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To Our Readers

Two new books by editors of THE HUDSON REVIEW have recently been published. In accordance with our policy, they will not be reviewed in these pages, but are listed here for the interest of our readers:

FREDERICK MORGAN: *Poems of the Two Worlds*. University of Illinois Press. $7.95; $3.95 paper.

MARCIA B. SIEGEL: *Watching the Dance Go By*. Houghton Mifflin. $10.00.

We are pleased to note that Jorge Guillén, first recipient of The Bennett Award, the new literary prize established by this magazine (as announced in our Autumn, 1975 and Spring, 1976 issues), has recently been named the winner of The Cervantes Prize, the highest literary award of the world's Spanish-speaking nations. The Cervantes Prize is given by the government of Spain; on this occasion, the selection was for the first time made the responsibility of the Association of Academies of the Spanish Language, the approximately twenty academies of the Spanish-speaking countries.

UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPTS WILL NOT BE READ BETWEEN MAY 1 AND AUGUST 1, 1977.

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Notes on Contributors

CHARLES TOMLINSON's most recent publications are *In Black and White*, a book of graphics introduced by Octavio Paz from Carcanet Press, and a selected poems of W. C. Williams for Penguin Books.

ARTHUR GREGOR* is the author of seven books of poems including *Selected Poems* and *The Past Now*, both from Doubleday. After a career in publishing, he is now Professor of English at Hofstra University and directs the creative writing and publishing studies programs.

A fellow this year of the National Humanities Institute, PATRICIA MEYER SPACKS is working on a study of adolescence in literature. Her most recent book is *Imagining a Self* from Harvard University Press.

WENDELL BERRY has published two new books: *Clearing*, a book of poems from Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; and *The Unsettling of America*, a book on agriculture from Sierra Club Books.

MARGARET CREAL* has published one novel, *A Lesson in Love*, and has finished a second. Her short stories have appeared both here and abroad.

GILBERTO PEREZ teaches the history and theory of film, its criticism, "appreciation," and practice, in the Visual Arts Program at Princeton University.

J. E. CHAMBERLIN has completed a book on Oscar Wilde for Seabury Press.

PETER GLASSMAN's most recent book is on the literature of confession in Victorian England.

Asterisk indicates a new contributor.

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CHARLES TOMLINSON

The Roe Deer

We must anticipate the dawn one day,
Crossing the long field silently to see
The roe deer feed. Should there be snow this year
Taking their tracks, searching their colours out,
The dusk may help us to forestall their doubt
And drink the quiet of their secrecy
Before, the first light lengthening, they are gone.
One day we must anticipate the dawn.

Providence

It is May: 'A bad winter,'
  They prophesy, the old women—they
Who remember still—for I cannot—
  Years when the hawthorns were as thick as now:
Spray on spray hangs over
  In heavy flounces, white swags
Weigh down the pliancy of branches,
  Drag at a whole tree until it bends:
I thought it must be these snow-brides, snow-ghosts
  Brought-on their unseasonable dream of frosts:
But old women know the blossoms must give way
  To berry after berry, as profuse as they,
On which, come winter, the birds will feed:
  For what in the world could justify and bring
Inexplicable plenty if not the birds' need?—
  And winter must be harsh for appetite
Such as they have the means now to requite:
  Old women reason providentially
From other seasons, remembering how
  Winter set out to hunt the sparrows down
In years when the hawthorns were as thick as now.

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Rhymes

Perfect is the word I can never hear
    Without a sensation as of seeing—
As though a place should grow perfectly clear,
    The light on the look of it agreeing
To show—not all there is to be seen,
    But all you would wish to know
At a given time. Word and world rhyme
    As the penstrokes might if you drew
The spaciousness reaching down through a valley view,
    Gathering the lines into its distances
As if they were streams, as if they were eye-beams:
    Perfect, then, the eye's command in its riding,
Perfect the coping hand, the hillslopes
    Drawing it into such sight the sight would miss,
Guiding the glance the way perfection is.

The Faring

That day, the house was so much a ship
    Clasped by the wind, the whole sky
Piling its cloud-wrack past,
    To be sure you were on dry land
You must go out and stand in that stream
    Of air: the entire world out there
Was travelling too: in each gap the tides
    Of space felt for the earth's ship sides:
Over fields, new-turned, the cry
    And scattered constellations of the gulls
Were messengers from that unending sea, the sky:
    White on brown, a double lambency
Pulsed, played where the birds, intent
    On nothing more than the ploughland's nourishment,
Brought the immeasurable in: wing on wing
    Taking new lustres from the turning year
Above seasonable fields, they tacked and climbed
    With a planet's travelling, rhymed here with elsewhere
In the sea-salt freshnesses of tint and air.

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The Gap

It could be that you are driving by.
  You do not need the whole of an eye
To command the thing: the edge
  Of a merely desultory look
Will take it in—it is a gap
  (No more) where you'd expect to see
A field-gate, and there well may be
  But it is flung wide, and the land so lies
All you see is space—that, and the wall
  That climbs up to the spot two ways
To embrace absence, frame skies:
  Why does one welcome the gateless gap?
As an image to be filled with the meaning
  It doesn't yet have? As a confine gone?
A saving grace in so much certainty of stone?
  Reason can follow reason, one by one.
But the moment itself, abrupt
  With the pure surprise of seeing,
Will outlast all after-knowledge and its map—
  Even, and perhaps most then, should the unseen
Gate swing-to across that gap.

At Dawn

In Memoriam F. M. D.

The blue took you, a wing of ash:
    Returning from the summit where
We had released you into the sky
    And air of earliest day, we saw
Deer at gaze, deer drinking
    Before the blaze of desert sun
Dispersed them: that liquid look
    So held us, it was less a thing
Consolatory than a fact of morning,
    Its freshness returning us to time,
Its farness acknowledging the claim
    Of such distance as we shall only know
On a wing of ash, absorbed against blue.

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ARTHUR GREGOR

Songs of Belonging

A Sequence for Hanna Axmann-Rezzori

The Rising

We landed

and like a flag hoisted in the wind
you rose

looked out again
across a terrain
vast
various
human

and soon recovered that sharpness
keeness of perception
with which waterbirds view
sleek targets
swift and shimmering

naturalness
strengthened you
shadows soon filled
their spaces

and you knew
that everything you looked at—
the dry riverbed
cars and motorcycles at
the railroad crossing
the lighthouse
the coast of the South
the innumerable tiny shells
on rocks in the shadow of rocks—
everything was connected

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a fabric like one
of sunlight
of water
of air

a fabric behind which
shines a face

endless and enduring

a face
that had beckoned you too
to rise

be you again

all of you

the sacred
and the less than sacred

To Be Part of

To be part of
the ebb and flow around you
no more no less
than waves are of the sea

to be in the houses and the trees
the lawns carefully kept
the flowerbeds
round metal bars between
the grass and gravel paths

to be in the things around you
as much as the things you love
are in you

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to feel that the world breaks into you
as music does

the people on iron chairs
the people on the paths
the people at tables outdoors

and the birds that fly up
between the trees
and the sky between trees:

you know then
you are where you are meant to be
are as you are meant to be

in this human climate

happy
or sad

The Loire at St. Firmin

A silkenness
of flow
water
air on water

a silkenness by the river

like lace
the foliage across

even the trees
conform to human size

as do the steeples
characteristic of this region

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the black steeples
of churches and chateaux

windows add to
the silkenness

by the light that
accumulates there

light discerned
by attention only

but is there
as surely as the river's flow

the canal's flow across the bridge
where from time to time
black barges add to
the silkenness
a flowing bulkiness

Hanna's House

Her house is like her paintings

She has brought to both the joy
inherited from stones, old
tile roofs, from church
steeples, walled-in gardens

She has never lost the child she was,
has created this space, these rooms
for it, for the child to be
free, at home and at ease

Nothing in this house could offend
the child

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The small pillows all the same size and shape
are arranged on the bed to form a color-blend
of all the shades of blue, and stand
upright like tin-soldiers standing guard
or small columns in a tiny city by the sea

Her pictures of old
stone buildings, steeples
white and gold
(a child's world not lost)
invite the child
to enter

especially the one of
an old chair, a grandmother's shawl
draped over it, both white as
the old age of time, a chair
and nothing else in
a deep space with blue hills

a chair for the child to climb up on,
from there to look out at grown-ups
in that odd old way
only the child has
that has not been robbed
of space

At St. Benoit

From the gentle countryside
the light through the trees
and on the fields

from the spacious square
the old houses with flowerboxes

from the well-kept square
through the large wooden door

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into
the large space of the church
into
the dim light
the organ music

into
the light held in
into
the sounds flooding the space

and the stillness

of light
and space

and the whiteness

into
the whiteness
of light held in
of sounds surging
and of the stones

the whiteness of the walls
of water solid, the stones

the whiteness of
the candles slim as
the height of the church

the web of
the arches
way up

the web of
the arches
from the depth
of grottoes

the water congealed, the stones

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From
the flow of light on the fields
the glitter of light through the trees

from
the spacious well-kept square
the old low houses, flowers
in windows and entranceways

into
this water congealed
this light
held in

into
these sounds like the
perpetual sound of the sea

into
this grotto under the sky

the light
held in

and the chants
throbbing

At Sancerre

Whether we drank fresh wine
at a cafe in this ancient town
atop a hill overlooking the river
and its tended valleys

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whether we remarked upon
the bent old woman with
her shopping bag who seemed
so much in place as we
watched her enter the
pastry shop across and leave

whether we noticed that
the street to our right
had been named The Street of
The Jews as far back as
the Middle Ages

whether we watched late in
the afternoon along the river's
bank maneuvers of
two small birds
snatching fish from the river
with incredible swiftness:

we sensed the pattern
was undisturbed

the pattern
long ago established
was as it had been.

And felt this particularly when
driving toward Chartres
we saw the great towers of the Cathedral
rising in the distance as though
growing from the earth

rising and growing across the fields
like sunrise
across the sea.

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At Chartres

Outside in the evening

To approach
and walk around
those massive sides
masses of stones
when the great portals
were closed

was like ascending again
at the end of day
to the garden with the mango tree
with the well and cowshed
and chair under the tree

Full of a grave love
the expressions in the stone
of the faces
the long figures
in the porches and the portals

Unaccountable
the eyes of the dead
that had waited
had peered from behind the leaves
the stares of the dead
fixed on the man below
about to speak.

Inside in the morning

I sat in this immense space upward
the long extended figures
the faces looking down

the colors bright

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the faces looking down

I sat and swayed like a child
a child lulled

and I began to remember
space beyond memory
sleep beyond sleeping

the figures floated

the faces looked down

the stones a sheen

In the Town of Chartres

Like a child for the first time
seeing a tree, bark, a flower
in the wood

like a child looking at essence
and the form of things

and the eye is purely what it sees
and nothing intervenes

so was our first look
so did we look at each other . . .

What can prevent
waves from thrusting themselves
upon each

lovers, face to face, or wrestlers
from rushing
at each?

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Nothing can intervene
and nothing did

until we turned

and it was not a calm
but desire
a desired agitation
made us turn

you to your companion at your table

I toward an alien land
days still and many miles beyond

Quai Voltaire

One last walk
by the beloved river

one last look
at the beloved buildings

the stately buildings
and the gardens and fountains
across

one last look
at the bridges and the river
and the tower up ahead . . .

Here where I have been so
at home
here in this most human
of habitations
here where I have rested
with the ease of

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the many many pigeons
under the many many eaves

this too
dissolves

this too
dissolves even if I did not have
to leave

but O
the faces of the many statues
outside the great cathedrals

hold it, hold this
that I must leave

this that dissolves

and the music
holds it
and the face of the girl playing

and the faces of the people listening

and the lips that cannot find the words

My Soul, a Girl

My soul
when I return
from where I am at home
to where I am not

is a girl
that had awakened
had smiled

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had laughed
singing songs

my soul, a girl
that when we drove through
tree-shaded streets
past gardens, old houses
and people at tables outdoors

had stood up in me
out of me
like a girl standing up
in an open car
her hair streaming
her face joy

my soul, a girl
that when I return
to where I am not at home

sits as though fallen
as though hunched over herself
in a grey space
behind a window with bars
and is ashen
all of her ashen

nothing that happens around me
will rouse her now

only art

only the songs when she hears them

the songs of the great joy of belonging

that she herself has sung

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PATRICIA MEYER SPACKS

Women's Stories, Women's Selves

BECAUSE WOMEN ARE MORE SELFLESS THAN MEN, a familiar theory goes, they feel less conflict about supporting and embodying high ideals.[1] Men must function in the dangerous realms of business and politics; they must compete and excel; they fight the world's wars while women bind the wounds. Few people would state the antithesis so crudely today, but belief in the innate orientation of women toward understanding and service persists: the motto of all-female Wellesley College remains "Not to be ministered unto, but to minister." How easy and appropriate women's "goodness" seems, given a very simple sense of that complicated noun: women care about others and keep the rules. As a woman recently observed during a psychologist's interview about her ways of making moral decisions, "It's against the law of nature to think of the self first." A man, many might predict, would say just the opposite.

An eight-year-old Scottish girl, Marjory Fleming, who died in 1811, before her ninth birthday, writes in her diary: "I confess that I have been more like a little young Devil then a creature for when Isabella went up to stairs to teach me religion and my multiplication and to be good and all my other lessons I stamped with my feet and threw my new hat which she made on the ground and was sulky an was dreadfully passionate but she never whipped me but gently said Marjory go into another room and think what a great crime you are committing letting your temper git the better of you but I went so sulkely that the Devil got the better of me but she never whip me so that I think I would be the better of it and the next time that I behave ill I think she should do it." *To be good,* for this little girl, is a lesson like multiplication, a lesson of whose high importance she is deeply convinced. Her extreme guilt at allowing

[1] I am grateful to the members of the Workshop on Female Psychology at the Boston Psychoanalytic Institute for providing a forum where I first developed and articulated the ideas in this essay. [This essay was written before the death of Anäis Nin. Ed.]

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herself to display bad temper, a "great crime," emerges in her references to the Devil and in her manifest desire to be whipped in order to alleviate her sense of intolerable wrongdoing. Isabella, all gentleness and self-restraint, provides a model instead of a whipping: the child Marjory feels the pain of this method. But she also admires Isabella, and she assumes that such female virtue as she represents must find its proper reward: "Isabella is always reading & writing in her room & does not come down for long & I wish every body would follow her example and be as good as pious & virtious as she is & they would get husbands soon enough, love is a very papithatick thing as well as troublesome & tiresome but O Isabella forbid me to speak about it."

Goodness, one perceives from both these passages, consists largely in self-suppression: refraining from bad temper, staying in one's room, not speaking about love. The child, who would obviously find it difficult to achieve, is urged toward relentless effort by love: her love and admiration for Isabella, her yearning for the love of a man which she assumes to result mysteriously but necessarily from feminine virtue. Louisa May Alcott, writing in 1846, at the age of thirteen, also associates her struggle toward propriety with her devotion for another, in this instance her mother. In terms which recall the conflicts of Jo, the autobiographical heroine of *Little Women,* she writes:

> I have made a plan for my life, as I am in my teens, and no more a child. I am old for my age, and don't care much for girls' things. People think I'm wild and queer; but Mother understands and helps me. I have not told any one about my plan; but I'm going to *be* good. I've made so many resolutions, and written sad notes, and cried over my sins, and it doesn't seem to do any good! Now I'm going to work *really,* for I feel a true desire to improve, and be a help and comfort, not a care and sorrow, to my dear mother.

To be good for the diarist comprises sufficient plan and goal for the life which stretches before her. She anticipates working not at any art or profession but only at the frustrating enterprise of moral self-improvement, demonstrable through what she can give to her mother: "help and comfort." Morality depends upon proper relationship with others; the effort toward adulthood amounts to a commitment of compliance. The external judgment that the girl is "wild and queer" loses power to hurt because contradicted by the mother's understanding, but the threat of negative judgment even

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from that ultimate source of female authority looms in the background.

For if women concern themselves centrally with other people's needs, they necessarily fear above all other people's rejection. Nor does this fear belong only to the young. Fanny Burney, writing as an old woman about her husband's death in 1819, describes her dilemma about calling a priest to the deathbed. Her French husband, bred a Catholic, had not practised his religion since his marriage, but neither had he renounced it. He wished to receive the Church's last rites. A priest, after spending three hours with the dying man, returned repeatedly in hopes of another interview, which M. D'Arblay gave no indication of desiring. Fanny Burney comments, "I was cruelly distressed; the fear of doing wrong has always been the leading principle of my internal guidance, and here I felt incompetent to judge what was right." Her earlier diaries, beginning when she was sixteen, amply document how fear of wrongdoing had governed her. In 1788, when she was attending the Queen at Court, she had a conversation with a clergyman about her pretensions to virtue. He asks whether she has ever done what she repents; she says yes, but not often, adding, "it is not very often I have done anything." When the clergyman enquires what has prevented her from doing wrong, she feels reluctant to answer because she might seem to be claiming superiority. He suggests that prejudice, education, and accident have saved her; she agrees, but adds *fear*. "I run no risks that I see," she explains—"I run—but it is always away from all danger that I perceive." Her interlocutor remarks that she can hardly call that *virtue,* it is not "the rule of right"; agreeing, she declares herself content that "it is certainly not the rule of wrong."

To avoid wrong at whatever cost, as the clergyman points out, seems an inadequate moral principle. Fanny Burney's response, acknowledging that fact, suggests that it is nevertheless the highest principle to which she dares aspire. What she means by *wrong*, it turns out, is mainly what other people will *judge* as wrong. Her father's standards dominated her entirely until a rather advanced age: when she was forty years old, he would not permit her to go out without a chaperone. Replacing father with husband, she yielded to male judgment always; and beyond these important men in her life, she remained ever conscious of the potential judgment of the world.

The pathos of her admission that she has not often done anything

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and of her confession of incompetence to judge what was right in the matter of the priest's visit—this pathos belongs particularly to women, to *many* women, especially in the past. All three of the nineteenth-century diaries cited convey, in their very concern with rectitude, a sense of moral insufficiency. Wanting passionately to be good, these examples hint, women find goodness a desperately difficult achievement partly because of the limitations on their imagining of it. Marjory Fleming need only do what she is told; she, of course, is too young to challenge the adequacy of the standards by which she is judged. But Fanny Burney, certainly old enough for challenge, also appears to find it difficult to establish any *personal* criteria of virtue; and Louisa May Alcott even in the turmoil of early adolescence cannot question her mother's absolute rightness. Which leaves the modern reader, moved by this kind of insufficiency yet recognizing it as such, in a quandary of feeling.

For there is another cliché about women, converse and corollary of the truism that women are "good": women are, after all, not very good at all; they lack the male capacity to develop complex and rigorous individual criteria of morality. This view, in its modern versions, owes a good deal to Freud, who characterized women as categorically less "moral" than men. To quote from his best-known statement on the subject: "For women the level of what is ethically normal is different from what it is in men. Their super-ego is never so inexorable, so impersonal, so independent of its emotional origins as we require it to be in men. . . . They show less sense of justice than men, . . . they are less ready to submit to the great exigencies of life, . . . they are more often influenced in their judgments by feelings of affection or hostility."

It is beside my point at the moment to consider the explanations Freud ventures for the state of affairs he describes. What emerges clearly from the sentences quoted is both the judgment of women's ethical inferiority to men and the implication that this inferiority bears some relation to the female preoccupation with other people. Because women are so much involved with understanding and caring for and serving others, the argument goes, they allow "feeling of affection or hostility" to affect their moral judgments. Men, more "impersonal" in matters of conscience, thereby testify their superiority.

No essential contradiction exists between this view and the attitude that women guard popular morality, keep the rules, preserve

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standards; the quotations from female diaries, for instance, support both positions. On the one hand we see from the diaries the female preoccupation with avoiding wrong; on the other hand we can hardly fail to note how much the notion of goodness is entangled with that of pleasing others, how *personal* is the female orientation toward virtue, how little women old or young seem to examine the rules they support.

My purpose is not to uphold such damaging clichés about female morality: neither the one that says women are *good*—i.e., unadventurous, conformist, uninvolved in the hard issues of competitive survival—nor the one that says they're not *really* good—i.e., incapable of rigorous, impersonal moral discrimination, at the mercy of their emotions, swayed by commitments to others. There is a much more complex argument to be made about women's relation to goodness, resting on the fact that what women say about themselves does not necessarily correspond to what they *do*. (One can, of course, make the same point about men, but the specific forms of discrepancy vary.) Women are trained to think of themselves, to describe themselves, in certain ways. The stories they tell about their lives take shape partly from their presuppositions about what stories they are *supposed* to tell. But stories and lives are not the same thing, nor descriptions and selves. Female formulations of goodness often reveal themselves as poses, disguises, protections. One can discover or surmise in the utterances of women about themselves the effective defensive function of their incorporation of male clichés, can come to question whether women actually act on the basis of such simple principles as they may claim, can even wonder, finally, whether "impersonality" in fact comprises the most significant criterion of moral excellence and whether the female concern with other people means what it has been taken to mean. The very fact that women so often describe themselves in the terms men might use to describe them suggests that their ways of writing, like their ways of living, frequently represent attempts to conquer by *incorporating* the damaging stereotypes of society.

Before looking into further implications of the diaries from which I have already quoted, it is useful to consider some twentieth-century instances which suggest how moral forms persist although content changes. Little girls still worry more than boys about being good. When children are given a sentence-completion test, boys often, girls almost never, finish a sentence beginning "Rules

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are . . ." with the words "to break." "Rules are to break." For girls, still, rules are to keep. A dream told in her own words by a seventh-grade student epitomizes some common female feelings about "goodness."

> I dreamt the whole school died and went to hello. (Without the o.) Everyone was walking around in devil outfits. With the fire in the background, etc. Jim Talbot was the king of the Devils. Every one went around cracking bad jokes as in, "You devil you," "You little devil," etc. I couldn't stand the bad so I went to Jim and asked him what to do. He said because I was so good he'd send me to heaven. So I was shot up and there sat Sylvia Federman, with a long white beard and she was God. She gave me a speech and then I woke up.

Taken simply as narrative, this dream suggests some costs and some advantages of the female sense of virtue. The costs involve both what is given up and what endured. The girl who cannot "stand the bad" is thereby cut off from the gaiety of hell, where fire glows in the background but the population occupies itself with the delights of bad jokes. Feeling superior, the girl must go to heaven, to listen to moral lectures instead of dubious jokes. Her rewards remain rather tenuous: the sense of superiority itself, the theoretical advantage of heaven over hell. "Goodness" appears to be her doom rather than her achievement.

The doom of female virtue, as expressed in twentieth-century autobiographies and diaries, takes many specific shapes. A few among the innumerable available examples will suggest something of the range of possibility. At a non-literary extreme, for instance, consider Joan Crawford's autobiography, *My Way of Life,* published—implausibly enough—in 1971. As the title may suggest, the book contains, in addition to its version of a life history, abundant household hints, advice about diet, exercise, and make-up, and tips on home decorating. All this good advice is weirdly incorporated into the autobiographer's sense of self.

> It's not easy at all to run a house—small or, as in my case, large as it was then—give the children all the attention they should have, adjust to day-to-day crises, and be cool, collected, and captivating at six o'clock. Not only must the children and the housekeeping be dealt with and finished, the wife should also emerge at that hour "finished"—in the sense that she has all her beauty treatments behind her and is groomed, fragrant, and looking ready for an evening with her favorite beau.
>
> A busy housewife might ask, but why *should* I go to all this trouble for

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> the guy? To me, and to other women I've talked to, the answer's simple: You love him and you want to please him, make him happy. Love can spring out of a need for security—not financial security, but the security of being wanted, adored. That's why women can give so much. When we're needed we become dynamos, and we're always looking for ways to please . . .

Even this short excerpt reveals the assumed identity between *pleasing* and *virtue*. The standard of virtue may not seem particularly attractive; most readers in 1977 do not believe that smelling good and being good are the same thing. But Joan Crawford demonstrates how they can be imagined to be identical, with her conviction that making a man happy comprises a woman's highest duty; any means to the desired end therefore partakes also of the overriding moral imperative, suggested by Miss Crawford's vocabulary of *must* and *should*. She translates her own experience, or her memories and fantasies of it, into a moral law: the way she behaved must be the way women should behave; otherwise she might have to entertain the terrifying possibility that she has not herself fulfilled the demands of feminine virtue. Like little Marjory Fleming, she imagines the reward for such virtue as "being wanted, adored." Behind her smug domestic pieties lurks the fear discernible in Louisa May Alcott and Fanny Burney—fear of losing the security of love.

At a much higher level of introspection there is Anäis Nin's endless diary, which functioned for her in the writing, she repeatedly says, as an escape from the miseries of day-to-day life. Turning one's experience into story, she thus suggests, helps to protect against its pains. Nin, of course, presents herself aggressively as a *feminine* being, insisting on the special values of a woman's ways of relating to others and of acting in the world. The writing of the diary itself, she maintains, is "a feminine activity, it is a personal and personified creation, the opposite of the masculine alchemy." This identification between the feminine and the personal implies a very different value judgment from the one Freud suggested for the same equation. Anäis Nin consistently glorifies herself for her personal involvements. In the second volume of the published diaries, for example, she writes, of her literary relationships, "I am the young mother of the group in the sense that I am giving nourishment and creating life. All of them now in motion. When I look at the changes, the transformations, the expansions I created, I

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grow afraid, afraid to be left alone, as all mothers are ultimately left alone. To each I gave the strength to fly out of my world, and at times my world looks empty. But they come back." In another passage she speaks of her pervasive "fear of loss, change and alteration," and claims that she writes "to combat this fear." Again, when a man comments on her apparent commitment to serving others, saying that such service hampers and blocks her expression of herself, she responds, "It [the life of freedom] is not compatible with being a woman. Within all these boundaries, restrictions, I do what I want."

We seem to be a long way from the girl who dreams that the reward of virtue is the opportunity to hear a lecture by God: Anäis Nin finds more gratifying rewards, beginning with her profound self-satisfaction. More important, she exposes some fundamental assumptions both about the nature of female virtue and about its psychological functions for the individual. A woman's goodness consists in giving and serving: the unconventional and cosmopolitan writer agrees on that point with the highly conventional actress (and with her nineteenth-century predecessors). It involves restrictions willingly embraced—the other women have known that too—and derives from fear of loss. But Anäis Nin adds to these perceptions something new: a quite explicit realization of the freedom and power generated by what appears an existence of self-sacrifice. "*Within all these boundaries, I do what I want.*" Fanny Burney could surely have said the same. Moreover, Nin's view of her own creative activity—not through writing but through the relationships she fosters and manipulates—implies her consciousness of enormous effective force. She creates life, effects change and transformation, gives others the strength they need in order to act—insures their return to her. Her self-description emphasizes her giving, her vulnerability, her fearfulness, but reveals something more.

None of the voices of women quoted here sound like those of men. The stress on service, love, weakness, inadequacy, and fear belong characteristically to female utterance. Male themes are different; men write most typically of the struggle for power and mastery in one form or another. But Anäis Nin may make us wonder whether the preoccupation with goodness and with power are in fact different versions of the same thing. She acknowledges that her acceptance of restriction constitutes a strategy for doing what she wants, in effect a disguise of selflessness. Her self-presentation as a whole

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raises the possibility that her mode of writing constitutes yet another disguise—this despite her frequent claims of absolute truthfulness. To profess utter devotion to others; to describe oneself (as Anäis Nin repeatedly does) as essentially a *womb,* a designation arrogating not anatomical but spiritual distinction—such accounts of the self disarm conceivable opposition. Everyone—including those who hate their mothers—is, we know, in favor of motherhood. The woman who claims motherhood's virtue thereby may achieve the freedom to do what she wants, preoccupation with goodness thus constituting an unconscious methodology of self-assertion.

Looking back at the nineteenth-century diarists in the light of this possibility, we may perceive that their stories taken as a whole—even the record of the child who died at the age of eight—significantly modify the implications of the individual passages which insist on the writer's obsession with being good. Majory Fleming calls her brother an "impudent Bitch." Of course guilt promptly overcomes her, she promises never to do it again, but the pleasure of the utterance manifests itself in the writing down. Her insistent effort to learn the lesson of how to be good in effect frees her to be "bad" on occasion—she can immediately atone by her verbal acknowledgement of sinfulness. Louisa May Alcott, by the time she was twenty-four, is writing in her journal, "I was born with a boy's spirit under my bib and tucker. I *can't wait* when I *can work.*" She goes out into the world, supports herself (and declares a complex sense of identity) by writing, but never abandons the protective coloration of her female virtue: at the age of fifty, she adds a note to a diary entry made when she was ten, about her good resolutions and her failure at them, commenting, "Poor little sinner! She says the same at 50." Fanny Burney requires of her father "permission to rebel" when she finds herself in an intolerable position at Court. But of course she manages to get the permission she needs. She leads a remarkably happy life, doing precisely what she wants to do—writing and publishing novels, avoiding meaningless society, enjoying her husband and son—without ever taking responsibility for self-will.

The whole-hearted embracing of orthodox and limiting standards of conduct, for many women writing about themselves, functions as a means of avoiding responsibility. One who describes her life as organized to fulfill the demands of others need not think about the choices she is making. Joan Crawford could hardly be

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accused of vanity or frivolity if devotion to her husband's wishes dictates her concern with minutiae. Fanny Burney actually claimed that she was having a baby only to please her husband, although her own excitement and pleasure manifest themselves in every sentence. Even Anäis Nin's towering narcissism becomes obscured by her loudly proclaimed devotion to others. These stories of goodness cannot be taken quite at face value.

In our own time, professions of female goodness assume some curious forms. Familiar standards have been overturned, even reversed; writers now report with apparent smugness actions or thoughts which twenty years ago would have been assumed to merit moral condemnation. Three times in recent years I have taught a seminar in Autobiography, in which the students, as a preliminary to studying other people's autobiographies, have written segments of their own for members of the college community to read. The forty-odd young women who took the course without exception wrote about their relationships. The single male enrolled described his ambitions and his efforts to fulfill them. A single male, of course, proves nothing—but his record of himself emphasized, for me and for the other students, the special quality of the stories women tell about themselves. One of these stories, written in the fall of 1973 by a junior, describes details of high school life in a way which suggests both the writer's standards and their source.

> My weekdays began at 4 a.m., when I got up to do my geometry homework. At 5 I would wash my hair and read the English assignment under the hairdryer. At 6, I would put on my make-up and begin the great clothes struggle. My sister Mary and I both had overstuffed closets and dressers, but we made the mistake of starting off the year in fashion perfection and were thereafter forced to keep up the image, or so we thought. So from 6:15 to 6:45 every morning we rushed from closet to dresser to closet seeking the "perfect" combination. We each ironed at least three outfits every morning . . . . We all bolted down hot cereal and toast while I helped Mary with her French; then we changed our clothes one more time.
>
> At 7:05 we bolted out the door and up the hill to meet our boyfriends for the walk to the bus stop . . . . School officially started at 7:45 and let out at 2. After school I walked the mile and a half to the hospital, where I worked from 2:30 to 7, and at 7 Spike picked me up to take me to cheerleading practice. After 9 we went to my house, and Spike stayed until 10. When he left, I collapsed on the bed exhausted, only to begin the whole rat race again at 4 the next morning. Occasionally I let myself sleep until 5 and skipped my geometry homework. I *never* skipped washing my hair . . .

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> Around the first of April, we had try-outs for the following year's cheering squad. I was sure I'd make it, but I didn't, and I almost died of disappointment. I couldn't understand it, but my mother . . . told me that one of the judges thought I was fast because I was dating Spike and didn't want me on the squad. Mother implied that she thought the judge was stupid for thinking that way, but I was crushed. If everyone thought we were "making it," we might as well be doing so. On Spike's birthday later in the month we went up to his camp and had intercourse for the first time. We threw the sheets out in the woods on the way back and bought new ones at Grant's the next day. The whole affair disgusted me.

A whole system of virtue, in some respects strikingly conventional, is implied by this account. The autobiographer describes herself as hard-working to the point of exhaustion, the goal of her endeavors the praise of her peers. Washing her hair is more important than doing her geometry not because she is vain but because, like the other women we have considered, she fears even the shadow of disapproval. The "image" she feels obliged to keep up is, one gradually realizes, far more than physical: she needs to convey herself to her contemporaries as a person of distinctive and admirable style. When failure attends her efforts in the cheerleading competition, she feels "crushed," she "almost die[s]." She thinks of her sexual initiation as one more social statement, the cause of the event no conscious choice on her part but the mistaken judgment of others. As if to emphasize her lack of responsibility, she assures the reader that she didn't enjoy making love, it "disgusted" her. A gesture of defiance rather than of self-assertion, her act appears to acknowledge that other people determine reality: if people *think* she is doing something, she virtually has to do it.

Of course this is an account of adolescence, a period in everyone's life when the opinions of others assume immense importance. A boy's response to pressure by his peers, though, is likely to be acceptance of challenge to acts of aggression or bravado. This girl reacts by laboring over her appearance and ultimately by submitting to sexual relationship which she claims to find disgusting. Her attempt at action as a cheerleader meets frustration: what you are able to *do*, she says, doesn't matter, only what is thought of you. And she writes with remarkable vividness about this perception, summing up a point of view characteristic of many women much older than she. The atmosphere of self-satisfaction about the narrative suggests her feeling, even in retrospect, that she has done the

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right thing—working hard, enduring much, deviously attempting to declare independence. Precisely as someone from a previous generation might boast her preservation of chastity, this woman of the seventies feels her loss of virginity a kind of moral achievement.

Unlike their nineteenth-century forebears, none of the twentieth-century writers cited so far speaks explicitly of "goodness" at all. Their language, whether imperative or self-congratulatory, does not directly allude to moral crisis or moral development. *Indirectly,* I believe, they do speak of their ideas of virtue and their self-concepts in relation to it. But the fact of their characteristic indirection, far more widespread in women's autobiographies than in their fiction, suggests that females, despite their traditional roles as guardians of virtue, do not really consider the realm of independent moral decision and action to belong to them. Some women—Florence Nightingale, Emma Goldman—writing about themselves claim the virtue of action in the service of a cause. But few consciously affirm their status as moral beings making choices significant in relation to their development. Partly, as I have already argued, they avoid verbally accepting responsibility for themselves. This form of deviousness, however, may also reflect feminine awareness that women's moral categories often differ from men's. By refusing to define themselves in relation to such categories, they avoid debate; they offer their lives for judgment but reserve their standards, or assume them so totally that they need no discussion.

The new self-consciousness of the feminist movement has forced women to examine themselves in this as well as in other areas, and the autobiographies of self-avowed feminists often seem to strike a new note. Behind the newness lurk familiar themes: concern with "goodness," however defined; fear of disapproval and ultimately of abandonment or loss of love; reluctance to assume full responsibility for the self; use of the rhetoric of virtue as a justification for fulfilling individual wants.

Kate Millett's *Flying* exhaustively records a few months in her life. In it she explictly acknowledges feeling the longing to be "good," which she understands as a psychic trap, a "vice," she says, a "sneaky desire" probably shared by millions. "What the devil is goodness?" she inquires. Chastity? Surely not. Was Gandhi good; if so, how can one hope to follow in his footsteps? By being a vegetarian? A sexual abstainer? "But that won't do for you," she tells herself, "you're a hedonist, a lover, want to have a good time,

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laugh, booze, make love, talk all the time, play with your friends, run around from place to place." Millett never explores the relation between this self-description and her confessed desire for "goodness": she abandons the subject after these few reflections, which occur near the end of the book. But in a sense the whole enormous volume attempts to answer the questions here stated and implied. One might suppose that someone committed to hedonism, to laughing, boozing, making love, playing, would accept her alienation from any ordinary ideal of virtue. Kate Millett, though, systematically if not entirely consciously sets about *redefining* female goodness. Vegetarianism and chasity are clearly irrelevant; her very choice of such instances as hypothetical examples suggests her impatience with conventional bases for moral judgment. She must find new standards; to take a positive moral assessment of herself appears to be a psychic necessity. She reports a recurrent dream in which she is about to be hanged; sometimes she expects a reprieve, sometimes she feels reconciled to death because, as she puts it, "I am guilty, of something awful." To compensate for this nameless guilt, she must discover her goodness—defying the conventional world, defying her mother, who as she says "makes reality," asserting not only her bisexuality but the high virtue of that way of life and the virtue of the assertion.

For like the student autobiographer, Kate Millett believes that *style* ultimately comprises the basis on which people are judged, and like the student (although twice her age) she feels herself to survive or disappear according to the way she is perceived by others. The definition of "others" shifts. Sometimes she worries about her mother: if she dedicates this book to her, will Mother understand and accept at last? Sometimes it is the community of femininists: does she dare risk their disapproval by claiming in the credits of the movie she has produced the distinction of being the "filmmaker?" By the principles of the Movement, to assent such specialness might be perceived as "elitism." (She solves this moral problem, interestingly enough, by finding someone else to urge her to do what she wants to do; thus relieved at least partially of responsibility, she can publicly identify herself as important.) She worries about the readers of *Time* magazine, which has converted her bisexuality into material for sensationalism; about women in general, whom she feels obligated to "help" in some unspecified way; about individual women whom she wants to love her, to give

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approval and praise. Her fear of disapproval from one quarter or another amounts to terror—a terror in important respects identical to what Fanny Burney designates as "fear of doing wrong."

For Fanny Burney, the rules were relatively clear; in the rare instances where no rules seemed applicable, like the problem with the priest, she found herself paralyzed. Kate Millett inhabits a murkier world. But she cannot simply construct her own rules, since the problems she feels centrally involve the judgments made by others; she must intuit the complexities of other people's standards. Or, if she makes up her own, she must desperately enforce them on others—on the reader, who stands for all those others. She has written a book which bludgeons you to accept her as a model of virtue.

Flying, a huge chaotic work whose chaos is part of its statement, establishes most emphatically the standard of *expressiveness*. Expressiveness is a style, the style of spontaneity; it includes making love, boozing, playing and the rest. Considered as a moral ideal, it may appear spectacularly inadequate, since it implies almost no demands on the self. Just to set down words on paper, the book implies, amounts to a moral achievement, since it is hard, Kate Millett repeatedly reminds us, to expose the self. But her "exposure" takes place at a superficial level. To be sure, she reports the details of her lovemaking with other women, and recounts the minute agonies of "She love me, she loves me not" with more specificity than most readers will find it easy to endure. She does not, however, engage in purposeful or disciplined or penetrating introspection; she has no vocabulary for conveying self-understanding (and would obviously scorn any effort to develop a systematic vocabulary); indeed, she has no apparent capacity for sustained interpretation of experience, beyond vague ideas of "guilt" and a general notion that her mother and/or her father must somehow bear responsibility for what has happened to her. She reveals nothing damaging about herself except what she apparently fails to know herself to reveal: the enormity of her self-indulgent assumption that everything about herself must be interesting. She confesses that she cannot remember conversations accurately—everyone in the book talks alike, including, startlingly, Doris Lessing. But she justifies her inaccuracy because she feels "More interested in the conversation, life, another glass of wine," in asserting her own vitality; after all, she never claimed to be a computer. Expressiveness as a goal implies no attention to *what* is

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expressed and little concern with *how*: Kate Millett freely displays the "slovenliness" of her art, which she acknowledges with apparent contentment.

Flying seems a significant document in considering women's moral self-presentation because it demonstrates in such an unlikely context the continuity of themes, images, poses. Words like *image* and *pose* suggest a divergence between the real self and the modes of presenting it, but in fact they may, like *style,* also designate means for communicating self-definition. Kate Millett with genuine desperation labors to create her image and style of sincerity, authenticity, expressiveness, those up-to-date forms of virtue. The conspicuous limitations of her self-awareness prevent meaningful sincerity: sincerity in communicating only the superficial cancels itself. But the intense effort toward the *effect* of sincerity closely corresponds to Louisa May Alcott's labor to present herself as good, Fanny Burney's to avoid any appearance of wrongdoing. In creating narratives of themselves, women continue to construct virtuous selves, valuing the justification through some version of goodness—traditional or modishly "revolutionary"—more than that achieved by power, accomplishment, or even glamor (although glamor and "goodness," in Kate Millett's case, seem closely allied).

The stories women tell of themselves are typically more complicated now than they used to be; traditional and modern forms of virtue may jostle for supremacy. Sylvia Ashton-Warner, discovering in the teaching of Australian children her vocation, finds herself volunteering to her husband to chop wood and feed the fowls so that he will have more time for study. "My work loses its value unless you are happy," she explains. "Everything loses its value. Your contentment comes before my work." Because her husband knows her high degree of attachment to her profession, he finds this claim baffling. She makes it more explicit: "It may not be apparent, . . . but I love you and you come first in the world with me, before everything, before anybody. You and the children. My family and home are more to me than my work." Displaying the familiar fear, she begs for assurance that she has been a good wife and mother; when her husband suggests that someone with her talents should not have married, she protests that for her "The *need* to study, to do, to make, to think, *arises* from being married." Ellen Willis, the *New Yorker* rock critic, an avowed feminist, reports her protracted struggle against her desire to please men by the roles she plays, her need for male reassurance about the quality of her

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work, her fear of rejection. All these standard emotional components of the female sense of virtue coexist in her with insistence on declaring her goodness by her independence. The dependency and need which both women confess and which help to determine their acting and their being do not exist merely as verbal formulations; they obviously represent genuine feelings. But they are among other things also ways of telling a story; the writer evokes such emotions, among the infinite number available to any autobiographer, partly because they provide useful methods of self-definition, self-reassurance, and particularly self-protection. The women who displays such feelings acknowledges her fear of being abandoned and accepts the moral consequences of that fear. The female concern with moral issues, as manifested in autobiographies and diaries, insistently associates itself with women's experiential awareness of lack of freedom, lack of social power. Women display their vulnerability and convert it into their virtue.

Occasionally a woman succeeds in setting down some version of herself quite removed from both new and old stereotyped moral categories. Women whose self-awareness allows them to perceive themselves as moral beings without associating their morality with their fear suggest high possibilities for female ethical development and emphasize by contrast the extent to which most feminine autobiography employs concern with goodness as a kind of disguise. Declaring moral independence without denying their dependencies, they suggest a sophisticated level of moral insight which includes and affirms the personal without being limited by it.

Simone de Beauvoir, in the first volume of her autobiography, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter,* explicitly considers the phenomenon of female self-presentation through an obsessional pose of virtue—a phenomenon for her associated with early childhood. "I had made a definite metamorphosis," she writes, "into a good little girl. Right from the start, I had composed the personality I wished to present to the world; it had brought me so much praise and so many great satisfactions that I had finished by identifying myself with the character I had built up: it was my one reality." The process of maturing, as she describes it, focuses on the necessity of discarding this "composed" personality. The successive stages of her development, however, continue to emphasize her desire to serve humanity and the yearning, which she perceives as closely related, to win universal love. By her early adolescence, she has decided to make herself a writer because thus she will "have the undying love of

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millions of hearts," while simultaneously asserting herself. "By writing a work based on my own experience I would re-create myself and justify my existence. At the same time I would be serving humanity: what more beautiful gift could I make it than the books I would write."

In the second volume, *Prime of Life,* the writer declares herself to retain much of this girlish naïveté about the rewards and the significance of literary composition: she still wishes to win love by writing. She also reports the evolution of the love relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre which became the center of her life. "For me there was no doubt at all where he was concerned; for me his mere existence justified the world—though there was nothing that could perform the same service for him." The familiar female dependency—and the familiar fear associated with it: she cannot allow herself to acknowledge Sartre's nervous breakdown and his subsequent psychic distress because she so much needs him to be imperturbably strong. But she understands her terror, at least in retrospect, and even at the time she is vividly involved in the effort to create her own separate life without denying that her lover generates for her the meaning of the universe: she needs union and demands solitude. To define her individual existence through work and through love becomes her precarious accomplishment, never fully to be achieved, never to be abandoned as a goal. Multiplying words in her search for precision of insight and of statement, she hints her special moral achievement: her capacity to accept her condition of recognized but unrealized possibility, her acknowledgement of vulnerability implying not the defense of virtue substituting for strength but the capacity to accept as a human necessity both the longing for and the failure at goodness. Unlike Kate Millett, Simone de Beauvoir understands the intricacies and the necessities of narcissism and guilt, the inevitable inaccuracies they produce, accepting herself and demanding to be accepted in her articulated existentialist imperfection.

Similarly, the German artist Käthe Kollwitz, keeping a diary through her later years of personal loss and creative triumph, embodies and enunciates a process of imperfect growth, her moral accomplishment, too, dependent on her embracing of necessary incompleteness. Her younger son dead in the First World War, she examines her own surviving will to live, discovering it as a version of the familiar female desire "to serve faithfully." "Since recognizing that," she adds, "I am almost serene and much firmer in spirit. It is

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not only that I am permitted to finish my work—I am obliged to finish it. This seems to me the meaning of all the babble about culture. Culture arises only when the individual fulfils his cycle of obligations."

"Culture" is a male concept. The woman dismisses talk about it as mere "babble," her own orientation personal. Its personal quality, however, implies her capacity—contradicting Freud's generalization—to accept "the great exigencies of life" not by explaining them (as men do with their "babble") but by enduring them, living in and through them, in the consciousness that individual effort toward "service" creates individual and cultural meaning, never justifying or compensating for weakness and loss, never allowing one to ignore those realities, but coexisting with them in the pattern of imperfection. Alone among the women whose writing I have touched upon, and rare among all the women writers I know of, she confronts her fear of loss as well as experiences the processes of loss, able to declare that fear powerful but finally irrelevant, her life of service through art not a desperate attempt to win the securities of love, not a defense, simply a personal affirmation of responsibility and of love.

The last women considered share a commitment to work as vocation, a genuine "calling." Such commitment provides rich material for stories about the self, lessening the necessity for moral self-protectiveness. But all the women noted here are writers, at least to the extent of composing diaries, and for all of them writing itself increases their grasp of moral possibility. Writing invites, demands, generates acts of choice. Many women—specifically, among those cited, Fanny Burney, Anäis Nin, Kate Millett, Simone de Beauvoir—recognize explicitly the possibility that writing provides a means to help others and to win love. Others must know this fact beneath the level of consciousness. Writing, moreover, declares the possibility of at least retrospective control over experience—that control which women in their lives so often lack. Controlling experience, diarists and autobiographers control also the images of themselves they offer to the world. Their images of virtue, in selfhood and in action, define ways of dealing with fear and vulnerability. Through their acceptance of fear and vulnerability as psychic necessities—as inescapable aspects of reality—at least some women outline the possibility of a morality both richly personal and richly transcendent, combining the insights which Freud considered uniquely male with further wisdom which may be particularly female.

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WENDELL BERRY

A Circle of Poems

Desolation

A gracious spirit sings as it comes
and goes. It moves forever
among things. Earth and flesh, passing
into each other, sing together.

Turned against that song, we go
where no singing is or light
or need coupled with its yes,
but spite, despair, fear and loneliness.

Unless the solitary will forbear,
the time enters the flesh to sever
passion from all care,
annul the lineage of consequence.

Unless the solitary will forbear,
the blade enters the ground
to tear the world's comfort
out, by root and crown.

The Strait

I
The valley holds its shadow.
My loves lie round me in the dark.
Through the woods on the hilltop
I see one distant light, a star

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that seems to sway and flicker
as the trees move. I see the flight
of men crossing and crossing
the blank curve of heaven. I hear
the branches clashing in the wind,
but I am cut off from the height.

2
I have come to the end
of what I have supposed,
following my thread of song.
Who knows where it is going?

I am well-acquainted now
among the dead. Only the past
knows me. In this solitude
who will teach me?

3
The world's one song is passing
in and out of deaths, as thrush notes
move in the shadows, nearer and nearer,
and then away, intent, in the hollows
of the woods. It does not attend
the dead, or what will die. It is light
though it goes in the dark. It goes
ahead, summoning. What moves, follows.

4
Sitting among the bluebells
in my sorrow, for lost time
and the never forgotten dead,
I saw a hummingbird stand
in air to drink from flowers.
It was a kiss he took and gave.
At his lightness and the ardor
of his throat, the song I live by
stirred my mind. I said:
"By sweetness alone it survives."

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The Law That Marries All Things

1
The cloud is free only
to go with the wind.

The rain is free
only in falling.

The water is free only
in its gathering together

and in its downward courses
and in its rising into the air.

2
In law is rest
if you love the law,
if you enter, singing, into it
as water into its descent.

3
Or the true law is song,
and you come into it singing
because it has no other entrance.

It is the great chorus
of parts. The only outlawry
is their division.

4
Whatever is singing
is found, awaiting the return
of whatever is lost.

5
Meet us in the air
over the water,

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sing the swallows.

Meet me, meet me,
the redbird sings,
here here here here.

Setting Out

for Gurney Norman

Even love must pass through solitude;
the husbandman must become again
the Long Hunter, and set out
not to the familiar woods of home
but to the forest of the night,
the true wilderness, in which renewal
is found, where the lay of the ground
is a premonition of the unknown.
Blowing leaf and singing wren
lead him on. He can no longer be at home,
he cannot return, unless he begin
the circle that first will carry him away.

Early Morning Dark

Oh Lord, I know
It will soon be day.
If I'm ever going to go
I've got to be on my way.

It's dark now

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And will be dark again.
I guess I'll make it somehow.
Lord, I don't know when.

Song

In ignorance of the source, our want
affirms abundance in these days.
Truth keeps us though we do not know it.
O spirit, our desolation is your praise.

From the Distance

1
We are others and the earth,
the living of the dead.
Remembering who we are,
we live in eternity;
the most solitary act
is a work of community.

2
All times are one
if the heart delight
in its work, if the hands
join the world aright.

3
The wheel of eternity is turning
in time, its rhymes, austere,
at long intervals returning,
sing in the mind, not in the ear.

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4
A man of faithful thought may feel
in the light, among beasts and fields,
the turning of the wheel.

5
Fall of the year:
at evening a frail mist
rose, glowing in the rain.
The dead and unborn drew near
the fire. A song, not mine,
stuttered in the flame.

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MARGARET CREAL

The Man Who Sold Prayers

In Memoriam: Marius Bewley

SHORTLY AFTER HIS FORTY-FIFTH BIRTHDAY, the Reverend St. Clair Gwynn—known to his friends as Saintly—ceased to believe in God. Granted, it was not remarkable that in the mid-sixties of this troubled century a man's Belief should fail him; it was remarkable that it should have survived intact until then. From his earliest childhood it had not wavered, fight it as he might in his college years when first exposed to the liberating delights of other creeds—Atheism, Agnosticism, Communism, Despair, Who Cares? Saintly found then that Belief was as firmly fixed in his character as was the language he spoke. Indeed, it was very much part of the language he spoke. Son of a clergyman—a good man whom Saintly, to his discomfiture, had not loved—he had been nurtured on the King James Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. Cranmer's rich rhetoric was as familiar to him as the rhymes and verses his Hebridean mother recited to him, and the songs she sang as he was falling asleep, about a fisher-king, an exiled prince being sped across the sea in a bonny boat, a tender queen in a prison cage. These songs remained vivid in his memory and were recalled to him many years later when he became acquainted with the paintings of Max Beckmann. He was often astonished at the inexhaustibleness of such connections, and saw that all human lives and ages were bound together, all contained in the Divine memory. (His own memory he thought of as a chain on which every moment of his lifetime was hung, quietly pulsing, awaiting its moment of recollection.)

When he was very young, a line from Genesis I had taken his fancy. "He made the stars also." The casual extravagance of the act had pleased the eight-year-old Saintly, reminding him of the itinerant magician who had recently visited his Saskatchewan town, drawing rabbits from hats, and a gold watch from the vest pocket of the school principal, a dour man with a slight squint in the left eye. Finally, from his outstretched empty hands the magician had flung a shower of golden coins. The coins had proved to be fake. Still,

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Saintly had pictured a similar gesture on the part of the Almighty, handfuls of stars being scattered across the floor of the sky. To the young Saintly the sky had been a pleasure dome of cloud-scapes, shooting stars, miraculous dawns and apocalyptical sunsets, white lightning, northern lights in season, and mirages—grain elevators hovering with insouciant ease above the horizon while below them the (ordinarily) flat prairie rolled on shimmering waves of heat. Sometimes, when on a frosty night he had stood gazing into the starry sky, he had seemed to feel the prairie tipping beneath his feet as the planet earth spun softly on her appointed course.

There was no particular event in the year 1965 to shake his lifelong belief. He read, with professional and personal interest, books about the Death of God, and attended lectures on the subject. Appreciating that for many people it was useful, even necessary, to come to terms with this new theological happening, he continued to prefer for himself the living paradox of God's existence to the verbal paradox of His death. As far as he was concerned God was, is, and evermore shall be, presumably outlasting the stars and the sky in which they sparkled.

True, the sky was not the delight to him that once it had been. It was often obscured by smog, and stabbed by television antennae and the high-rise buildings of the Eastern Canadian city in which he lived. Things less celestial than stars and planets travelled across it now; planes, and rockets, space-ships, possibly flying saucers.

Far below, Saintly and his soul jogged along.

Saintly was rector of an average sized parish in an average income suburb, loved by many and esteemed by all of his parishioners. The usual things happened in his parish—infants were born, and growing up were by turns happy or unhappy, learned or failed to learn, fell in and out love, bought cars and houses, met with accident, failure, disappointment, occasionally with some small success, took sick, died. Saintly, attentive to all these events, saw in each a microcosmic drama.

The church, dedicated to St. Jude, was a new building in contemporary style, erected and paid for during his incumbency. Sunday services were well-attended, and the parish house was a regular beehive of activity. Every evening there were meetings and discussion groups, there were monthly square dances, and annual bazaars and rummage sales, frequent productions of Gilbert and Sullivan as well as cynical plays by avant-garde young Canadian

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dramatists. There were religious instruction classes for children, and dancing classes, Corners for Brownies and Dens for Cub Scouts, there was a weekly Yoga class, and a weekly lunch party followed by card games for the Golden Age Group. Also, potluck suppers for young Marrieds, and Circles for sewing. Documentary films were shown, and educational films about Buddhism, the tribal life of the Tsimshians in British Columbia, and other such subjects. In short, it was a lively parish, and Saintly, as his fond parishioners said, was always "on the go."

It was in Autumn, just when all these enterprises were going into full *crescendo,* that Saintly admitted to himself that something was awry. He had come back from a month's vacation with his wife and children feeling as if he had had no vacation at all. The family doctor tested him for a variety of ailments and could find nothing organically amiss. A simple case of overwork, he told Saintly, and prescribed vitamin B and a day off each week. Compliant, Saintly took Mondays off. He played golf on fine days, and tried to look forward to the ice skating season, his favorite. (He had been, in his youth, a hockey player of exceptional brilliance.) Sometimes he and his wife, Ann, went to a film or dined at an Italian restaurant. But he could not shake off the oppressive fatigue, and wakened each morning with a murky-mauve feeling about the day ahead. He thought of the color as F double-flat, and had always associated it with the cry of the lake loon, whose night yodellings had often startled him out of childhood sleep, apprising him of loneliness, madness, and death. There was no pleasure for him in his life, or his work. Boredom settled on him like dust.

His daughters, Emily and Camilla, complained that he didn't laugh any more, or tell them stories about his childhood, which by comparison with theirs was delightfully antediluvian. Fire engines pulled by horses! Wooden sidewalks! Pigtailed Indians in buckboard wagons driving down the main street! School dismissed early so the children could go outside to watch an airplane fly over the town! (From the open cockpit the pilot, eerie in cap and goggles, had waved at the gaping crowd in the schoolyard, and flown off into the pearly sky, trailing behind him a colorful pennant on which was printed INDIAN HEAD CHATAUQUA.)

Saintly roused himself. "Why don't you tell *me* a story?"

Camilla told him a shaggy-dog story, and he laughed. But they were not fooled; it was not a genuine laugh.

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Soon he was beset by something more alarming than fatigue. When celebrating the Eucharist at weekday and Sunday services, he found himself unaccountably short of breath. He could scarcely speak, and felt as if he had been running a long hard race. Curiously, it only happened when he was praying, never when he was preaching or reading the Lessons for the day, or the Epistle and Gospel. Ann was surprised to hear about it. She said he sounded "perfectly normal." He decided it must be his imagination, and considered going to the Yoga class to learn how to breathe. But the class time coincided with his weekly visit to the Federal Penitentiary, where he had made several friends among the lifers, with whom he played poker (not for stakes) and to whose reminiscences of life on the outside he listened. His schedule was too busy to permit a change, and he resolved to conquer the problem on his own.

But the thing—whatever it was—that had got possession of his breathing redoubled its attack. A tight band, hard as iron, began to press about his throat and chest, and he was in actual pain, as well as discomfort. He began to dread his priestly functions as, when in fourth grade, he had dreaded school. Many days he had spent crouched in a cement culvert near the railroad tracks, and had had to forge letters purportedly from his mother, regretting that her son had been sick. That was a fact; he had had a bellyache that had lasted a whole year. It had vanished on the day he was promoted to fifth grade and a new teacher. It was not so simple now. There was nothing to be promoted to.

He found it incredible that no one in the congregation seemed to hear his labored breathing, or the thinness of the voice he managed to squeeze through the iron band that threatened to strangle him, and nowadays jeered and jabbered at him, trying to jumble the prayers as he read them. (He no longer trusted his memory.) Sometimes he feared he had mouthed nonsense, or worse, and did not know whether to be relieved that it had been tactfully ignored, or to consider his parishioners demented, not noticing his gibberish. His anguish was extreme, and as afraid of it as he was of the enemy presence within him that caused it, he could speak of it to no one, not even to Ann.

Christmas was a nightmare, but he survived, getting through Midnight Mass like a person hypnotized. He had the impression during the Prayer of Humble Access that the thing had succeeded,

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it had choked him to death. Later, standing at the church door, wishing the joys of the season to friends and strangers, he saw that his existence depended not on his own perception of it, but that of other people.

On Boxing Day, he did not take the girls skating, as he had done ever since they could remember. (They loved to skate with him. "Is that *your father?*" other children asked, gawking respectfully as Saintly skimmed by, at one with the ice and the bright transparent air.)

"I've forgotten how," Saintly said, regretfully.

They stared at him in vexed disbelief. Emily, who was twelve years old and had a hot temper, said he was a mean old meanie-cat. Camilla, two years older, permitted her topaz eyes to brim, and said he had ruined their day. Ann came in and shooed them away to skate by themselves. Her eyes, so like Camilla's, were dark with worry.

"You're not yourself," she said.

She had no idea how frightening those words were.

"You must take a little holiday, the minute the annual meetings are all over," she told him. "We'll manage it somehow. Where would you like to go, and when?"

"Where" and "When" floated tantalizingly around the room. He could see them attaching themselves to various objects—tables, books, a scarlet poinsettia, the bright baubles on the Christmas tree.

The Sunday after Christmas, normally a lethargic one, brought out a large congregation to honor the bishop of the diocese, who was paying his yearly visitation to St. Jude's. He was a portly man, with a ready smile, and he had a habit of intoning his words, so that his simplest remark seemed cloaked in authority. Richly mitred and robed, and clasping in his jewelled hand the gleaming pastoral staff, he had just begun his sermon—"At this season of the year, we think of God . . ." when Saintly rose from his stall and disappeared into the sacristy. He hung up his vestments, put on his overcoat, fur hat and boots, and trudged across the snow-drifted lawn to the rectory, to slip numbly into bed. There he stayed, arms folded across his chest, scarcely speaking.

At his request, Ann kept away all visitors. Except for the bishop, who perhaps unable to conceive of himself as having other than a

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therapeutic effect upon a sick clergyman, marched up the narrow staircase, down the hall, and into the bedroom.

"I'm terribly sorry," Ann said, when the bishop had gone. "I couldn't stop him. He simply bolted past me."

"Who?"

"Oh, Saintly," she said, reproachfully. "You couldn't not have noticed that the bishop was here. He's dull, but he's not invisible."

"Someone was here. I couldn't quite make out what he wanted. He seemed a harmless sort, though."

The smile he gave her took the shape of the deep dark lines that in the past few weeks had been graven into his face. She suddenly saw that it was a clown's smile, and had to hurry out of the room, to cry in private.

It was given out that Saintly was suffering from overwork, and on the doctor's orders was taking a rest. Parishioners, distressed to hear that he had depleted himself on their behalf, flooded him with get well cards and potted plants and bottles of Harvey's Shooting Sherry, light novels and puddings. They asked what they could do for the rector, would he like a portable television set? A new bathrobe? A vacation in Florida? A jigsaw puzzle?

"Does he care for lemon meringue pie?" asked the president of the Women's Guild, proffering one.

"I don't know if he cares for it. He eats it, if that's what you mean." This sharpness was uncharacteristic of Ann, but she was weary, and worried by her mysteriously ailing husband who in fact had that afternoon told her in a sober, judicious way, that he cared for nothing and nobody. He had added that he was "very sorry."

Each morning she brought him his mail, and writing paper so that he could write thank you letters—he had always been punctilious about such things. But he wrote no letters, merely appended a line to a communication from the personnel manager of a trust company requesting a character reference for a prospective employee. "Judge not, that he be not judged" Saintly scribbled in a hand that had all at once become large and ungainly. He put it in the stamped self-addressed envelope and gave it to Ann to mail.

After a month of leaden days and nights tortured by insomnia, Saintly called a psychiatrist, whom he had met while taking part in a television panel discussion, "God or Psychiatry?" (Saintly had

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opted for God), and said in his courteous way that he would like to be admitted to a mental hospital.

Six weeks later he was ready to emerge, electro-shocked into new being. Dr. Brudenstein, a spry man with bright black eyes, had a consultation with Ann shortly before her husband was discharged. He had news, he said, that might be something of a shock to her. Certainly it would radically alter her way of life.

Ann sat bolt upright, bracing herself.

"Your husband," he continued, "has made a remarkable recovery. He is a walking advertisement for our treatment. But he can never, must never, does not want ever to go back to his old job. He no longer believes in God."

"Oh . . . ." said Ann, on a long relieved breath. It was Divine associations, then, that Saintly wanted to renounce, not domestic.

"Matter of fact," Dr. Brudenstein mused, tapping his cheek, "his trauma over Disbelief was the most convincing argument for Belief that I have ever encountered. All in all, a unique case."

The bishop, who had often spoken of Saintly as "a simple man of good faith" was perturbed to hear how matters stood. "He is *having a dark night of the soul," he told Ann. Privately, he thought* Saintly's behaviour excessive; if every clergyman took his Belief—or Disbelief—so seriously, the church would be in a pretty pickle. He pressed a buzzer on his desk, and asked his secretary to bring him a cheque-book.

"What are we going to tell people?" asked Ann, watching his neat penmanship. "It's going to be a fearful shock to his parishioners. You've no idea how they depend on him. What if . . ." She stopped, picturing Belief disappearing from every suburban street, vanishing like water running down a hole.

"We intend to say that he is taking an extended leave of absence from his pastoral duties," the biship smoothly replied.

"But it's a permanent leave," she cried, knowing Saintly wanted that understood. She took the cheque he handed her with a murmured thank you.

"Ah well, there is no need to labor the point, is there?" He patted her shoulder, and bade her remember that they always had a friend in him.

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In the bus, going home, Ann looked at the cheque. One thousand dollars, from the bishop's discretionary fund. She realized what a comfort money was when you had nothing else, and tried to think of a way to make some.

When Saintly had been home for a few days, their great friend Simon Boyd came to see them. He too was a clergyman, several years younger than Saintly, and a man of considerable talent. Recently, a special post had been created for him. He was Consultant-at-Large to the Anglican communion, and flew about the globe, preaching, lecturing, consulting, setting up programs and projects, moderating panels, training people in Encounter-Group techniques, presiding over Group-Life-Labs.

"Delicious. What a treat," Ann said, tasting the Jack Daniels that Simon had brought back from San Francisco, where he had been the keynote speaker at a Church-World Institute.

Saintly drank apple cider with a cinnamon stick in it. He was in tranquil spirits, though not talkative, and excused himself early. He would play Scrabble with the girls, he said, and if it did not seem rude, go to bed early. He explained that he was dreaming a continued story, each episode of which began promptly at nine o'clock.

Ann was glad of a chance to confide in Simon, who had always seemed part of the family. Simon had already considered most of the problems she faced, and had solutions for some of them. For instance, as they would soon be leaving the rectory, they must live in his house until they found something to their liking. He would be gone for three months on a tour of war-and-famine struck Asian countries. (As far as he was concerned, he added, they could live in his house permanently.) And Saintly should apply immediately for early retirement on grounds of ill health.

"He wants to be deposed," Ann said.

"How like him. But we must dissuade him from doing anything rash."

"I'm afraid he'll insist. He'd think it dishonest to go on tacking Reverend in front of his name, getting sent free tickets to religious spectaculars, and turkeys at Christmas from the undertakers, that sort of thing. Being deposed would clear the air. Of course it'd be disillusioning to an awful lot of people."

"That's a delicate point. Best not to use it as an argument, I

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think. We'll take a practical line. If he insists on being deposed he'll lose his pension rights, and certain other fringe benefits—low premium insurance, the girls' tuition at their school. They're minor, but they add up. Let me talk to him, it's easier for me."

"You won't worry him about the girls, or me, will you? I've been thinking, my godmother owns that new boutique, the Just Fancy. She might give me a job, she's crazy about Saintly. I'll buy a nifty outfit and get my hair cut at Sassoon's—I can use the bishop's money, it'll be an investment—and present myself to her."

"Fine. But you'll still need the pension. It may be a while before Saintly gets on his feet. What do you think he has in mind to do? Has he talked about it?"

"He's thinking of going into the odd job business. He's going to hang out a sign saying 'No Job Too Small.' I thought No Job Too Big would be more of a lure, but he disagreed. Have you any ideas?"

"I'm toying with one. Let me see if it comes to anything. I'll be doing a bit of groundwork while I'm away."

Surprisingly, Saintly put up no resistance to remaining a clergyman in good standing, if not in good health. "Why not? It's just money."

Simon and Ann concealed their satisfaction.

"The Pension Fund," Saintly went on, "has probably done more to hold the church together than any amount of dogma. The Church's one foundation, you might call it. I understand they've pretty much scrapped the Virgin Birth, and other miracles, but they'll never scrap the Pension Fund. What other security is there?"

"You shouldn't bait Simon like that. You're taking advantage of him. You probably know that Dr. Brudenstein said we mustn't argue with you."

"Dr. Brudenstein lacks confidence in his cures." Saintly smiled. Those deep dark lines would probably never disappear from his face, but now, refashioned by his smile, the effect of them was, unexpectedly, mirthful.

Ann sold all their non-essential possessions to a second-hand dealer. The rest they stored in Simon's basement. Even with the pension money, and Ann's part-time job and Saintly's odd jobs, the

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going was difficult. They agreed they could not stay forever in Simon's house, and before he came back they had used the rest of the bishop's money to rent a little house, built apparently of various thicknesses of cardboard, in another part of the city. Harmonyville, it was called.

"Horrorsville," Camilla glumly renamed it.

"We can pull the shades down, and then we won't know where we are, will we?" Ann said, in what she hoped was a bright persuasive tone.

"Since when is getting lost a groovy idea?" asked Emily.

But they were resilient children, and loved their parents, and at least they did not have to change schools as well as neighborhoods. By bus and subway they travelled daily to the excellent school they had always attended. (Tuition free, as the daughters of a clergyman.) Ann, thanks to the efficient urban transport system, was no further from the Just Fancy than she had been before.

By picturing them all lying horribly maimed in hospital beds, she sometimes managed to convince herself that things could be worse.

Saintly regretted having to leave his most leisurely job, walking a widow's poodle for two half-hour periods a day. His responsibility on these excursions was to see that the poodle—a gray and grizzled old fellow—performed, as his mistress put it. She was hard of hearing and, when Saintly and the dog returned, would shriek from the kitchen window, "Well, did he perform? One and two?"

"All satisfactory," Saintly would usually call back. Sometimes he could report only one performance, and he and the dog would have to promenade again. The dog's lack of concern for a workingman's wages amused Saintly. "You're making me work overtime, *gratis,*" he said. The old fellow stretched his lips in the way poodles do.

"How do you think Saintly will take to it?" asked Simon.

"Gosh, I don't know," Ann said, thoughtfully sipping her wine. The two of them were having lunch at a good French restaurant to celebrate Simon's return. Saintly was unable to join them. He was at his Monday job, clipping greens at an expensive golf club, in return for which he got $2.50 an hour and the privilege of using the course when there were no members on it. "I don't see how he can write prayers when he doesn't believe in God."

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"Matisse, busy at work on that chapel, made a point of saying he didn't believe in God."

"Religious subjects have always lent themselves to art."

"Writing prayers is an art, isn't it? Fortunately for their congregations most clergymen still fall back on the prayer book, but there's a multitude of twentieth-century conditions the prayer book doesn't address. Think of the Astronauts. Why, Saintly might write a prayer for the first man on the moon. Not that I expect him to plunge instantly into interstellar affairs, or even international. There's always a need for special-occasion prayers. I have no gift for them, and Saintly's have always been very obliging. I have a file of his compositions, and I've never used one that I haven't been asked for copies. Some I've used, with minor changes, for several events. One that he wrote for the Junior hockey finals I've used for a bonspeil in Manitoba, a soccer match in Ceylon and a baseball game in Tokyo. In each case, by the way, the right team won. Anyway, on this last trip, whenever I used one of his prayers, I told people about Saintly. Forced by ill health to retire, charming wife, two young daughters, having a bit of a struggle. I suggested that a little gratuity wouldn't be in bad taste along with a request for a prayer. Mind you, I don't think there'll every be big money in it, but . . ."

"Every penny counts," Ann finished. "How I hope Saintly will agree to try it."

At first Saintly said no, flatly. "I'd rather sell patent medicines at a county fair. Besides I've lost the formula."

"It's easy enough to find it," Simon said. "Brush up on your prayer book."

Saintly's face went still, as it had done in the bad days, the lines deepening in it, the gray eyes remote.

Seeing this, Simon said, "It was only a suggestion."

"It seemed a super idea, odd jobwise," Ann said, "but if you feel you can't do it . . ." She sighed, and there was silence for a moment in the cardboard parlor.

Saintly got up and stretched, a long long stretch, as if he were loosening every muscle and joint in his body. "I'll give it a try," he said. "Tomorrow I'll start the prayer wheel turning."

Simon and Ann looked at each other.

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"I picked up a few orders in England, on my way home," Simon said, matter-of-factly. "Unfortunately, with the exchange unfavorable, the total was only $7.86. Still, it's a start."

"The lord loveth a cheerful giver," Saintly said, handing the money to Ann.

By the following noon, Saintly had finished his first assignments. He had covered the opening of a strawberry festival. (". . . Thou, who hast given us of Thy bounty, look affably upon this seasonal gathering, and grant that these kindly fruits of the earth may bear fruit in kindliness in our parish . . .") Closing Day in a boys' school, (. . . bestow upon us the courage to be generous in triumph, of good spirit in defeat, swift in the service of justice, uncompromising in the pursuit of excellence . . .") the launching of a fund drive for a civic art gallery, (". . . may our eyes be opened to see in these works of art, fashioned by human hands, a reflection of the everlasting art of the universe, fashioned by Thy divine hands . . ."). Finally, he provided a blessing for a new recreation room in a home for the elderly, (". . . Thou, who hast created this world for Thy pleasure, graciously direct us in our recreation, that it may be honorable, amiable, and always pleasing in Thy sight . . .")

Finished, he stamped and addressed the envelopes, and sent them air mail to their destinations. "My prayers fly up, my thoughts remain below," Saintly said to himself, dropping the letters into the scarlet pillar-box on the corner. He hurried home, changed his clothes and went off to do his Wednesday yard job for a retired Naval captain and his wife, who gave him tea on the back stoop at four o'clock, out of a slightly chipped blue willow cup.

For some months Simon continued to bring the prayer orders back from his travels, scribbled on bits of paper and tucked in his pocket along with crumpled bills. One evening, he said, "I think we've got the thing off the ground now. I picked up fifteen orders in Chicago over the weekend, and several people—apparently in no immediate need of a prayer—expressed an interest. I left your name and address with the Episcopal Book Centre, and they'll deal directly with you. And if that goes smoothly, we can hook into the whole network of church bookstores and conference centres."

"It makes it seem less fly-by-night," Ann said, encouragingly.

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"I rather liked that part of it. On the other hand, a nuisance for you, Simon, having to do the leg work."

"It was no trouble. It was just getting beyond me, as I hoped it would. You'll do better if people can reach you directly, particularly in emergencies. Do you remember doing a job for a civic art gallery, in Leeds? Not only did their drive go over the top within weeks, but they were given a Henry Moore for the garden."

"Goodness," said Ann, "I never thought of your getting results, did you, Saintly?"

"If you don't mind?" Saintly turned to Simon. "I'd rather not hear about results."

"Well, Simon can tell me," Ann said. "I adore magic, things like prayers being answered, extra-sensory perception, all that kind of thing."

"I suppose you are both too young to remember the heyday of the magic lantern." Saintly leaned back in his chair, fingers laced across his chest. "When I was a child, I always attended the Wednesday evening Lenten lectures delivered by my father, and illustrated by slides that came, each week, in a black box secured with leather straps." He paused, then went on the voice—at once ironic and rueful—that was peculiar to his reminiscing, "During pauses in the narration of the missionary journeys of St. Paul, I could hear the hum of the carbon arc lamp. One Wednesday evening, I glanced at my father's senior warden. In the pale light, he looked liverish. I said to myself, Mr. Beardsley will die before this day is done. Late that night the telephone rang in the rectory. Mr. Beardsley was dead. I felt guilty. I had been responsible for his death. I also killed Mr. Dawkins, the plumber. One Sunday, in a rage because my head refused to memorize the Collect for the day, I hurled my prayer book to the ground and, under my breath, muttered an oath. At that exact moment, Mr. Dawkins walked by. My murderous rage had its effect. Only hours later, the call came. Mr. Dawkins had passed on to the happy home of all plumbers and steam-fitters, where the living waters ever flow, with never a hitch in the words."

He smiled, almost apologetically, while they laughed.

Naturally, there were problems to be ironed out with the bookstores. Managers wanted Saintly to quote prices. Did he charge by

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the word, they inquired, and were there discounts, job lots? Two religious book publishers, one Presbyterian, the other Roman Catholic, wrote that if he had a book in mind they would be happy to discuss it with him. Such requests Saintly ignored. He filled requests for prayers (without a set fee) and that was all. Then an unforeseen complication arose. Bookstores began allowing customers to put prayers on their charge accounts.

Simon, in Washington to chair a conference on Sex in the Christian Society, got word that there had been a sudden lag in prayer production. The orders, a puzzled saleswoman told him, were not being filled, not even being acknowledged. Customers were disappointed, especially several congressional representatives who had now and then to address a sectarian group, and found Saintly's felicitous phrases invaluable. It sounded ominous, and as soon as Simon got home, he hurried out to see Saintly.

"Look," he said, taking a business-like tack, "there seems to have been a bit of a snafu. Has anything gone wrong?"

"It's the charge account system. Charge accounts are fine for department stores and oil companies, but they're no good for prayers."

"I see what you mean," Simon said, relieved to hear this simple explanation. "After all, you can't keep books with God."

"I don't know about that. But I know I can't write prayers without cash. I'm not sure what the connection is, but there it is."

"Wouldn't you even take on a charity case?" Ann looked at him, dismayed.

He shook his head. "Prayer is out, as a charity. And on a charge account basis."

"It's so unlike him," Ann said later, with a troubled air. "Can you imagine Saintly demanding money, and for prayers, of all things? How can he do it? He's never cared about money."

"That's exactly it," Simon said. "Worthless prayers for worthless money. If he gave them away—don't you see?—he'd be implying that they were worth giving, that he had something to give. And who knows, perhaps prayers that people buy, cash on the line, have more efficacy than the ones they get for nothing, or on a pray-now, pay-later basis." He added, reassuringly. "Put it this way. There's no doubt that Saintly would help a blind man across the street. It's simply that he wouldn't pray for his safe passage."

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Restored to a pay-to-pray basis, Saintly's facility returned. His mail daily increased in volume, and registered and special delivery letters came to be a nuisance, requiring that Saintly leave the "dinette" where, using a straight pen, and ink, he wrote the prayers on lined foolscap.

"Jeez," said the postman, a bent old man whose jacket reeked of cigarette smoke, "looks like you've got one of them mail order rackets going."

"Some might say so," Saintly agreed, sprawling his name on the receipt book.

"Anyway, it's always a pleasure to talk to you, Mr. Gwynn," the postman said, and went whistling down the street.

Every evening Saintly handed Ann the money that had come in that day.

"We'll have to keep track of it for the income tax, I suppose," she said. "It's amazing how these dribs and drabs mount up. Of course, the real turning point was that bishop. He uses up prayers like kleenex."

This particular bishop, prelate of a rich metropolitan diocese in the United States, was noted for his mellifluous voice and stunning left profile. These gifts, which had originally helped raise him to his high office, now made his presence *de rigueur* at many smart secular functions. Wherever he went, nowadays, went one of Saintly's prayers. His secretary provided Saintly, at the beginning of each month, with a cheque and a copy of the bishop's official engagement calendar. Marvelling at the man's endurance, Saintly provided invocations or blessings for lunches and dinners honoring everyone from St. George the dragon-slayer to the widow of an art-collecting multimillionaire. And many other events—a Charity Ball (". . . we humbly ask that Thou, having granted us time to dance, and music, will grant us grace also, that our every step may please Thee . . ."), the launching of an America's Cup contender, (". . . if it be Thy will, command Thy fair winds to follow this vessel over the moving face of the deep, and bring her, in honor and safety, through every trial . . .") the dedication of a new dormitory in a famous women's college, (". . . pour down the light of Thy wisdom upon these honorable women, that they may shine delectably among the polished corners of Thy temple . . .").

Of this last prayer, Simon, when guest-preaching at the college

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some months later, heard high praise, and was assured that never in the distinguished history of the college had there been such a wealth of brains and talent and beauty as there was in the new dormitory.

Ann was charmed to learn that.

"I constantly run into people," Simon went on, "who've subscribed to Saintly's prayers and had positive answers. Others are equally pleased with the wait-and-see response. I cite a fruit farmer on the Niagara Peninsula who had ordered a prayer against an early frost. There was an early frost, and he lost his crop. He was desperate. Then along came a Buffalo millionaire who wanted to turn gentleman farmer, and was prepared to pay a whopping price. Result: the fruit farmer and his wife have bought a place in Florida, where they've always wanted to live and where frosts are few. He asked me to say that the welcome mat will be out for any of you, any time."

In 1972, the Gwynns moved into a different income tax bracket, and into a different house. It was perched on the edge of a wooded ravine, and they got it for a song, because it was big and old and badly in need of repair, and in a neighborhood no longer fashionable. Saintly's odd jobbing had made him handy with tools and paintbrush, and he repainted exterior and interior, rebuilt the railing around the wide verandah that enclosed three sides of the house, repaired shutters and cabinets, and on a whim, fixed the dumb waiter that wheezed its way up from the old kitchen where there was a wood burning stove, the very thing for his bread baking.

There was a tower, too, which he used as a workroom. He had a table and chair, and a cot for catnapping, and a shelf on which he kept paper, ink and fresh pen nibs, a World Almanac, and a Liturgical calendar on which were marked all the High and Holy days, and the saints' days, both red letter and black.

There, every morning, he wrote prayers.

In the afternoon, he prepared the dinner—Ann's job was full-time now, and Saintly did most of the household chores—and later worked in the garden. He espaliered peach trees against the old brick wall, and planted roses of every color and size, early-blooming and late-blooming. Their fragrance filled the air all summer long, attracting brown velvet honey-bees and butterflies in elegant dresses. When he had finished his work, Saintly stretched out in a deck chair, thinking his thoughts.

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Of necessity he was becoming something of a recluse, but he did not seem to mind. As word of his miraculous gifts spread, requests for his time and services increased. He was adamant, however, against public appearances and interviews, and could not be coaxed by any of his former colleagues into addressing even the smallest gathering.

One day, though, he found wandering about in the house a female reporter from one of the city newspapers, and mistaking her for a harmless prowler, fell into conversation with her. That is, she conversed, and inspired by his attentive listening discovered in herself intuitions and perceptions she had not known she possessed. He made tea and cinnamon toast for her, and heard the story of her life. Upon leaving, she realized that she had not got the scoop she had come for. This marvellous man whose privacy (she now realized) she had grossly invaded, had scarcely said a word! But she had something else. She had on the neat little tape-recorder that she carried in her bag an unusually interesting monologue. She had not realized until then that her own life was worth writing about, but finding that it was she made it into a novel, which enjoyed a small critical success. She sent a copy to Saintly, affectionately and gratefully inscribed. Saintly, who did not recognize her name—she had given him a false one—said after reading it that it was odd, he had heard the identical story before.

The girls, in their final years of school, flourished, and took their father's peculiar notoriety in stride. Friends who visited them for weekends envied them their parents, seeing Ann as a liberated woman who laughed easily and warmly, and was also good looking. Of Saintly, a friend of Camilla's said, frankly, "I thought he'd be some kind of *creep,* instead I meet this really sweet cat that pays *attention* to me and says what do *I* think of things? Oh wow, if my father caught me meditating in full lotus position he'd say why didn't I go play tennis or do something *normal.* Your father just went on making waffles. He's really tuned in."

During Spring vacation, the girls went to a "retreat" for high school students, superintended by one of Simon's spin-off groups.

"How was it?" Saintly asked, when they returned.

"Super," Camilla said. "Really out of sight. We had this worship service at sunrise where everybody got up and danced, or spoke a haiku. You didn't have to, but if you wanted to it could be about

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anything. It didn't have to be about a drop of dew on a blade of grass. One guy did a neat one, about his Vespa. Then we had meditation, and discussion groups about drugs and sex and politics and does life have any meaning."

"And what did you conclude?"

"Yes and no," Emily said. "That chicken pie smells yummy. Say grace, Cam, it's your turn."

"God's dead / Pass the bread."

"Pass the bread, please," Ann said, in mild reproof. "I must say I don't think that qualifies as a grace. It rhymes, and that's about all."

"Also, it's passé," Emily put in. "What about, Buddha's neat / Let's eat."

"That one rhymes, too," Saintly said, approvingly.

The theological picture had changed considerably since Saintly had lost his Belief. The death of God movement had peaked, and its heyday over. Death itself was beginning to attract wide attention. Many new varieties of religious experience were being undergone. A close personal friendship with Jesus was popular in some circles, particularly amongst young people. Groups of businessmen met for breakfast at Holiday Inns, and began their day with prayers and hymn-singing; they testified that their career opportunities were markedly improved. Out of the East came messiahs with rich smiles and large motor cars and new recipes for spiritual well-being, often involving eccentric diets. Anthropologists returned from primitive societies converted to primitive faiths that required the use of hallucinogenics, and a sloughing off of those inhibitions imposed by "civilization." Baptism by immersion became popular in churches where formerly a drop of warm tap water had sufficed. Lakes, rivers and streams were awash with saved souls, and so were the harbours, dotted with graceful sailing vessels, of several fashionable resorts. Churches that were *au courant* set aside a room as a *zendo*. Faith-healing and glossolalia were commonplace. Love-Ins and Pray-Ins were staged in urban cathedrals. In sophisticated parishes radical chic prevailed; mass was celebrated in private houses at the cocktail hour, with champagne and imported biscuits spread with pâté substituting for the conventional wine and wafers. Everywhere, God was being forced out of the stultifying confines of church buildings and into the world where He could become Activist.

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The rector of Saintly's former parish was a live wire type, who preached the Social Gospel. "It's scold, scold, Sunday after Sunday," complained the (former) president of the Women's Guild, the very one who years earlier had wondered if Saintly cared for lemon meringue pie, and who still came to call now and then, bringing something home-baked for the Gwynns. "One week he scolds us for sitting in a nice warm church when we ought to be down at the steel mill where they've having the strike, and the next week it's because we're not out at the penitentiary protesting about that hijacker who had the unhappy childhood. I'd like to hijack him! *And,*" she drew a breath, "the latest is we're supposed to go to dirty movies, did you ever hear the like? He says we're too smug. That Marlon Brando! I'd like to smug him!" Her eyes flashed with daring.

The market for prayers climbed steadily. It was on the rise everywhere, Simon reported. In the United States, an Episcopal clergyman, chaplain of a large university, published a book of original prayers. Entitled, *Let's Hit It Together, Jesus,* the book was selling like pizza from coast to coast, and its author was a frequent guest on television talk shows. He was also photographed for the newspapers as he went about his affairs, leading a march against the war in Vietnam, hammering on the door of an off-off Broadway theatre closed because its current production had been banned as obscene, in exhortation with a fix on upper Broadway. (The fix had *his* face turned away from the camera.) Asked by a magazine writer what he thought of the Reverend Gwynn, the Canadian prayer writer, the swinging clergyman said, "I don't doubt he's sincere, but he isn't into the Seventies. His prayers are irrelevant."

"This really makes me barf," Emily said, disgustedly, handing the magazine to her father.

"That's a very nice shrub he's wearing," Saintly said, studying the picture of the bearded man in the clerical collar.

"He'd better not try to put you down! Calling you 'sincere'! What a twerp."

In fact the published prayers only whetted the public appetite for personalized prayers. The telephone rang so often with long-distance and local calls that the Gwynns had to ask for an unlisted number. It made him feel unreal, Saintly said, to talk to clients, and

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besides, he was often confused with Dial-a-Prayer, a tape-recorded service sponsored by a life insurance company. "It can't be good for their business," he said to Ann. "What kind of advertising is that? You're promised a prayer, and instead you get a sleepy voice croaking out Hullo, and waiting to hear who's calling."

Thanks to intermittent strikes in the Postal Service, Saintly had periods in which to catch up with back orders. But the price he paid was high when a strike was ended and the postman—this one young and sturdy—unloaded his overflowing sack in the front hall. He—and a few chosen friends—had a special ring to alert Saintly, who otherwise did not open the door.

The letters all had to be sorted and separated, as the wheat from the chaff. Those reporting satisfactory results—the first line was enough to clue Saintly in—were torn up and burned in the kitchen stove, along with crank mail accusing him of gulling the public or using the mails to defraud. There was also commercial correspondence, much of which entertained him. What a diversified world his solitary occupation touched upon! Astrologists peddled their horoscope services. Artists wanting to illustrate his prayers enclosed samples of their work, usually representations of saints with moping faces, barefoot and with squared-off toes. (St. Francis outran all other saints six to one.) A man with a divining rod suggested a partnership. A radio evangelist in distant Tijuana offered Saintly his mailing list, for a fat fee. He sent along a glossy 8″ by 12″ photograph, which showed that he bore a striking resemblance to a man who had once cheated Saintly in a used car deal.

Camilla, married to a bio-physicist and living in Chicago, and Emily, still in college, exchanged newspaper items referring to their father. Camilla found an interview with a Milwaukee man who had grown rich in the plastic bag industry and purchased a racing stable. His horse won the Kentucky Derby, and dazed with triumph the proud owner declared that the victory had been due to "a prayer I bought from a minister up in Canada, some kind of saint." And Emily sent Camilla a small dispatch from Rome, containing the news that Libera Leone, touted as the successor to Sophia Loren, had found a new life through the prayers of "a defrocked priest in Ontario, Canada." "Pretty rococo!" Emily scribbled, in the margin.

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Such tidbits brought reporters, photographers and curiosity seekers scampering to the Gwynn's house, hoping for a word with Saintly, or a glimpse of him. It was remarkable that in all these years he had avoided being photographed or interviewed. A cabinet minister, whose wife was a client of Saintly's, called him "Canada's most closely guarded secret."

Simon said that Saintly had become a cult figure. "They've all but canonized him," he told Ann.

"Well, as long as they don't bring a halo," she said. "Not that he'd have anywhere to wear it. He doesn't dare step out of the house now, except to work in the garden. If people sneak in and find him he pretends he's the gardener. He puts on a Scots accent, you'd swear it was the real thing. But it *is* getting difficult. A few weeks ago some people came in their wheel chairs. I felt like a dragon, saying they couldn't see him. I gave them pencils and paper and they wrote out their orders and trundled off. One of them came back not long ago with a hooked rug she had made for Saintly. It had a little church on it, of all things."

"Was she in her wheel chair?"

"No, on foot," Ann said casually. "She was using a cane. But you can see, it's getting out of hand. And Saintly's been looking tired, lately. It's depressing work. Sometimes when he gets behind I help—not with the prayers, just with sorting letters—this pile is people who want to be healthy, this pile is people who want to be rich, this one's people who want to interfere with their children's lives, that one's people who want a change in something, the climate, or the government. It all boils down to I Want. No one orders a prayer that says God, how marvellous! or You're simply divine! or This is absolute heaven! Which is what I hear all day long at the Just Fancy. I'm not being funny," she protested, when Simon laughed. "When you come right down to it, it must be very depressing, hearing all those I Want's, and Give Me's."

"For Saintly?"

"For God, too. Not that I'm comparing the two," she hastily added.

Simon looked troubled. "I had no idea how the thing would snowball," he said. "If I'd known, I'd have thought twice before suggesting it."

"It's not your fault the prayers keep getting answered," she said, firmly. "The original suggestion was a perfectly good one."

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One rainy October morning when Saintly sat down at his table in the tower to begin his day's work, fatigue overcame him. He cast a longing glance at the cot, but said to himself, sternly, "Look to the ant, thou sluggard," and began to write. The pen in his hand was a cruel weight, and his fingers cramped, holding it, pushing words across the page. In some perplexity he pushed his chair back and got up. Immediately, the fatigue lifted.

He spent the rest of the morning chopping kindling, and piling it beside the wood on the back porch. Finishing, he considered raking the lawn—a high wind the night before had brought down a fresh fall of leaves. Instead, he strolled about, stepping delicately to avoid crushing the leaves, whose beauty all at once amazed him. He thought he had never before noticed their rhythmic shapings, the brilliance of their colors. In his mind's eye he saw the black metal box of Reeves's paints he had been given for his tenth birthday, each glistening cube with its name printed beneath it—Crimson Lake, Rose-Madder, Burnt Sienna, Ochre, Umber, Vermilion. And there they all were, those euphoniously named colors, burning softly in the gray air. What a fiery language they spoke! How splendid Nature was in her profligacy, all those leaves gorgeously rotting to replenish the earth! In a few months the unleaving trees would again be dense with foliage and sweet with bird song.

Standing there, he heard in his head the high pitched voice of the horned prairie-lark, saw it rising from the stubbled prairies in swift undulating flight, disappearing into the vasty sky, still singing.

Joy overwhelmed him. He thought of leaping into the air, climbing a tree, getting on his old bike and riding no hands down the hill. From the ravine gardens came the smell of wood smoke. His whole childhood with all its innocent pleasures and secret sorrows flashed upon him as he stood in his autumn garden, and he was caught not in memory but in a suspension of it. Time past and time present were fused; for that instant he seemed to stand outside himself, looking into the heart of things. He felt that he had been reborn.

But the next morning, and the morning after that, the same fatigue engulfed him, and his hand trembled under the weight of the pen. His fingers went numb, and sharp pains shot up into his arm. The words were there, but he could not inscribe them.

The family doctor said it was a simple case of writer's cramp. He prescribed muscle relaxants, and advised Saintly to use a tape-

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recorder for the time being, and then purchase an electric typewriter.

Ann brought Camilla's old tape-recorder downstairs. She switched it on, to see that it was in working order, and found that it was harbouring a vivacious reading by Camilla and Emily from *The Importance of Being Earnest,* the scene in which Gwendolyn and Cecily meet, vow eternal friendship and part on icy terms, all in the space of ten minutes. Saintly laughed so hard that he had to sit down.

"There we are," Ann said. "I'll get a supply of tapes and all you have to do is talk into this saucy little gadget. I'll get the stuff typed up and you'll be back in business."

After a moment, Saintly said, regretfully, "I'm afraid I can't do it. I don't know why, but I know I can't do it."

The mail piled up. Ann asked Saintly did he have any old prayers around that she could copy? "At least people would be getting something for their money."

Saintly, who was punching down a batch of bread dough, said, "Wouldn't it be simpler to send the money back?"

The prayer wheel, after ten years, had stopped turning.

Camilla and her husband, and Emily and her boy-friend, a sculptor who worked in welded steel, came to spend the New Year's holiday with their parents.

"What's happened to Father?" asked Emily, when Saintly had gone down to the kitchen to check on the goose he was roasting. "He looks so young!"

Ann took a good look at him when he came back. How had she failed to notice? Those deep dark lines had almost disappeared from his face. Perhaps, after all, they had only been sketched in. For a moment she regretted that. She had grown fond of the clown's smile.

After dinner the young people went down to the ravine rink to skate. It was a cold, still night. The sky gave the impression of having lowered itself and was full of stars that quaked and trembled just beyond arm's reach.

Camilla, waltzing with Emily's boy-friend, was the first to see Saintly. "Look!" she cried.

"Is that your *father*?" he asked, respectfully, stopping to watch as Saintly stroked in long *legato* across the ice, as easy as a bird in flight.

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He came to a stop beside the four of them, his skates sending up little jets of ice dust.

Emily said, "You told us you'd forgotten how!"

Skating backwards, he described a circle around them, in herringbone pattern. "If you live long enough," he said, "everything comes back to you." Tipping his head, he looked up at the starry sky. His breath smoked in the frosty air.

Naturally, there was a considerable flurry when word got about that Saintly, having ceased to write the wonder-working prayers, had come out of retirement. Several parishes expressed an interest in calling him as rector; Saintly referred them to the bishop, who was pondering his application for reinstatement as an active priest. He had appointed a committee to consider Saintly's "case" and together they screened the letters that poured into the episcopal offices.

Former parishioners wrote of Saintly as a kind man and dedicated pastor, and employers of his odd job days remembered him as honest, reliable, hard-working, and a gentleman. The widow whose dog he had walked said that if her old poodle could come back from the grave he'd have nothing but good to say of the Reverend Mr. Gwynn. Countless clients, rising above personal disappointment at the turn events had taken, vouched for his integrity. A woman in Yonkers, N.Y. testified as follows:

> At first when I didn't win the State Lottery I was real disappointed, but I'd kind of got used to saying the prayer the Reverend wrote for me so I just kept on saying it. The words are so nice. And I guess I've found that Spiritual Fortune he wrote about, and it's better than anything money can buy. Believe you me. It's like they say, I've got a 'new lease' on life, and I'm going to say that prayer for the rest of my days.

There was a good deal of unfavorable criticism, too. Cynics—amongst them several of his fellow clergymen—said that the prayer business had been falling off and he wanted In again. Skeptics debated whether he had falsely claimed magical powers or magical powers had been falsely attributed to him. A psychology journal interviewed a hundred and twenty-seven persons who claimed that their prayers had been answered, in an effort to prove that the whole thing had been an example of human chain reaction; people believed something because other people believed it. They cited

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flying saucers, the Abominable Snowman and the Loch Ness monster as other examples of the same phenomenon. The piece, entitled *Build a Better Mouse Trap . . .*, took up most of the issue, and contained such (unverifiable) statements as, "For a buck I bought a prayer that put my kid through dental school."

"I wish I knew where he practised," Saintly said. "I'd beat a path to his door. I have a tooth that wants filling."

"*You* may think it's funny," Ann said, as she gave the magazine to Simon, who hadn't seen it, "but I'm fed up with all these explanations and speculations. At least good old Dr. Brudenstein didn't blab. He just said yours was a unique case. Goodness, it seems no time since he said that to me." She dropped a kiss on Saintly's hair, which was as thick as ever but now snow-white.

"You're a hot sermon topic, too," Simon said, glancing up from his reading. "Did you notice last Saturday's paper? 'Prayer: Positive Reinforcement?' 'Magic or Mass?' 'Is Your Prayer Necessary?' 'Doubting Thomas; True Believer?' "

"Those people need an answering service," Saintly said, spreading honey on a toasted scone.

"Do be serious," Ann said, laughing. "Couldn't you make up one simple clear statement that would satisfy everybody?"

"One simple clear statement that would satisfy everybody," Saintly repeated, tipping back in his chair and frowning thoughtfully.

"Well—almost everybody."

"What about simply saying you've recovered your health?" Simon suggested. "No one can quarrel with that."

"A capital idea!" Saintly got up, looking pleased. "And in fact, the fact. I wonder I didn't think of it myself."

Simon was right. A man's good health may be enviable, but unlike matters of conscience and belief, it cannot be disputed.

An enthusiastic young internist took down Saintly's case history, and put him through a battery of tests. A week later, when all the results were in, he pronounced Saintly fit as a fiddle.

The bishop, reassured, summoned Saintly to his office. He offered him a glass of sherry, and a cure of souls in a rapidly growing suburb. Saintly said he would like to have a week to think about it and talk it over with Ann. The bishop said he could take two weeks,

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or even three. Time, he declared, was relative. He advised Saintly to think of the past ten years not as time wasted or lost, but as a period of growth.

Saintly, recalling that the clerical shirts and collars he had impulsively purchased that afternoon were a half-size larger than those he had discarded a decade earlier, said he thought there had been some growth.

The bishop then mused aloud upon enriching experiences and the unfathomable nature of the Divine Will. "As the poet Cowper puts it," he concluded, " 'God moves in a mysterious way / His wonders to perform.' "

Saintly finished the verse for him, pleased as always by the sturdy athletic feat implicit in the imagery. " 'He plants His footsteps in the sea / And rides upon the storm.' "

He had not taken the poet's words as having a personal reference. It had never occurred to him to think of himself as a wonder.

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JAMES BAKER HALL

Witnessing the Full Moon

In the sky light
above the bed, a clear
bubble, like a dream
of the world's arc,
stars fall straight
at him like rain,
& her body is bent
around his like the rings
of Saturn,
& in that artifice
of the essential warp,
the quarter moon rising
from all four directions
at once, the way love
gathers him slowly upward
toward completion,
he sees
what is & what appears to be
finally as one,
& is gone
in that light.

ANNE S. PERLMAN

Easter Snow

Too fat, too brief, too late.
These flakes slanting
out of season.

No joy here
like Indian Summer
with its warmth . . .
that last cast of light
on our walls, in our bones.

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GILBERTO PEREZ

The Narrative Sequence

> "Begin at the beginning," the King said. very gravely, "and go on till you come to the end: then stop."
> —Lewis Carroll: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

> When he appears on the stage, besides what he is actually doing he will at all essential points discover, specify, imply what he is not doing; that is to say he will act in such a way that the alternative emerges as clearly as possible, that his acting allows the other possibilities to be inferred and only represents one out of the possible variants.
> —Bertolt Brecht: "Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect"

THAT TELLING A STORY and counting things are related acts is suggested by the words we have for them. To tell can also mean to count; a teller can be one who tells or one who counts. To recount means to tell as well as to count again; an account can be a computation or a narrative. The same word, *contar*, means in Spanish both to count and to tell; *compter* and *conter* are almost the same in French, as are *zählen* and *erzählen* in German. Telling is indeed like counting, not in content, of course, but in form: a story is told in succession, one thing and then another and then another, as things are counted. It may be that we tell about things that happened one after another, with the succession of the telling corresponding to the order of events in time, as we count a row of objects following their order in place. It may be that we describe a landscape, or the contents of a room, telling in succession about things that were all there together, giving them an order nevertheless in the act of describing them, as we would in that of counting them. When we count things, one, two, three, we mentally put them in a row, even if they are not in any particular order themselves. We perform the same operation when we tell about things: we put them in sequence.

We look in the things we count for an order we can follow in the counting, beginning here and going on this way to end up there; but usually this order is more or less arbitrary, our choice of a sequence where none is unmistakably present. Telling a story we

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may likewise want to follow the natural succession of events. But it is not in the nature of things that they always come one after another in time; it is owing to the arbitrariness of language that they have to come one after another in the telling. There may be some order, even if not a succession in time, which seems natural to follow: describing first, for example, what strikes us as the dominant feature of a landscape. But someone else describing the same landscape might be struck by a different feature, or think it better to tell about other things first and save the most impressive for last. A narrative sequence, what is told first and what next and what next up to the end, is usually to some extent an arbitrary choice. This arbitrariness, the succession we make of things when we tell about them, marks the artifact that is a narrative. A narrative is not just a story, something that happened or is imagined to have happened, but a story told: not a sequence that happened but a sequence made.

A painting is the opposite of a narrative: it is there all at once. It may contain a story—any painting does that depicts an ongoing event, a battle, say, or a young woman reading a letter next to a window—but the story is put in simultaneous form. Narrative makes life into a sequence; painting makes life into a simultaneity. Lessing's argument in the *Laocoon* was that narrative is an art of time and painting an art of space, that narrative deals properly with what is sequential in life and painting with what is simultaneous. This argument neglects the arbitrariness, the rendering of life in a way that life is not, that marks a work of art as a thing made. Shklovsky called *Tristam Shandy* "the most typical novel" because Sterne's continual intrusions on the story he is telling, the liberties he takes with the time of events, call attention to what is true of every novel, that the narrative sequence is not a fact of the story, the life recounted, but an arrangement given to that life in the process of recounting it. The simultaneity of a painting is equally an arrangement—not necessarily the way things are, or could be, but the way they are made to be.

A sequence is an open-ended arrangement, admitting of indefinite addition; a simultaneity is conclusive. A narrative can go on and on, coming to an end at some point but even then potentially continuable; a painting is all there before us. A narrative, continued, is still a narrative; whereas to imagine a painting continued, what comes after it in time or what lies outside it in space, is

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no longer to think of a painting but of a different kind of thing, a comic strip perhaps, or a movie. A painting is a thing complete in itself, with no more to come, no more to see. A narrative is an additive thing and always subject to further addition—of more that happened in the story, of more and more that, as Sterne demonstrates in *Tristram Shandy* by his dwelling at inordinate length on some brief event, can be told about anything that happened. Counting stops when every item in the set being counted has been covered; but in telling a story it is impossible to cover everything in the life being recounted. Any account given of that life, however thorough, is of necessity partial, incomplete in time and in space, an enumeration of items in a set (the world) which is not denumerable, since it is inexhaustibly large and capable of being inexhaustibly detailed.

In a photograph, like a painting a simultaneous presentation of things, what is presented is but the fact of a simultaneity, reproduced by the camera: the things we see in a photograph happened to be together in the world, they were not put together in the picture. A painter starts with a surface on which he makes a picture; what he puts together on that surface is all there is. A photographer starts with something in the world of which he takes a picture; what appears in that picture is not all there is in the world before the camera, only a section of space seen at a certain time from a certain perspective. A photograph is there all at once but it is not *all* there; like a narrative, it is an incomplete presentation, a partial view. It is always legitimate to ask how a photograph may continue, what more there is to see that would be shown from a different perspective, or at a different time, or in a different section of space. A photograph is not a sequence but it is a fragment of a potential sequence; it invites being continued, continued by a caption, as happens with news photographs, or continued by other photographs, as happens in the movies, twenty-four times a second.

The movie camera automatically provides a sequence. The first movie ever made showed, from the fixed position where Louis Lumière put his just invented camera, the gates of a factory being opened, the workers leaving for their lunch hour, the gates being closed—a beginning, a middle, and an end to please Aristotle, or the King in *Alice*. But this is the mere fact of a sequence, an event passively recorded by the camera, not the arrangement of a se-

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quence that would be made in telling about the same event, with a narrator choosing what to tell about it and in what order. The movie camera, left to itself, does not put things one after another like a narrator: it merely records them that way. Lumière made the choice of where to begin, of where to end, and of where to place the camera; everything else in his movie was done automatically. Already these three choices are something like the choices of a narrator; but Lumière made them in such a way that his movie is as little as possible like a narrative. He begins at the point where the event begins, with the gates being opened; if he had begun with a held view of the gates before they were opened, that would have had the effect of making us wonder what comes next, a narrative strategy. He ends at the point where the event ends, with the gates being closed; if he had held for a little while a view of the gates after they were closed, that would have led us to expect something more to happen; his film would have been less the simple record of an event and more like a narrative to be continued. The choice of where to place the camera could not help but make something like a narrative arrangement: the sequence of the workers leaving the factory is a fact, but the sequence of them entering and leaving the frame is an arrangement brought about by the placement of the camera. Lumière, however, placed his camera at a window across the street, in a position to give us an encompassing view of the scene. A closer view would have made the entering and leaving frame a more emphatic arrangement; showing us less of the scene, it would have made us wonder what else could have been shown. A view from further away, showing us more than just that scene, perhaps the window frame or some other object in the room where the camera was, would similarly have made us wonder what else was there in that room. We may still wonder what else, or what next, for Lumière's movie, like any photographic record, could have been continued; but he sought to give it as much as possible the completeness of a painting.

At one point in *Moana,* Robert Flaherty's documentary film about Samoa, we see a native boy starting to climb a coconut tree. We don't see the whole tree, only the bottom part of it, and that view is held, as the boy climbs up, until he disappears at the top of the frame. Then the camera moves upward to take in the boy climbing up another section of the tree, no longer the bottom and not yet the top, and that view is held until the boy again disappears

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at the top of the frame. Again the camera moves upward, to take in now the top part of the tree, and the boy still climbing until finally he reaches the coconuts he was after. Like the workers leaving a factory, the climb is an event with a built-in beginning, middle, and end which could have simply been recorded in the manner of Lumière, from a fixed camera position sufficiently far back to take in, all in one view, the whole tree and the boy climbing it from the bottom to the top. But Flaherty chooses his own beginning, middle, and end which are not simply those of the event. Like a narrator, he makes a sequence of something that is not: he shows us the tree a piece at a time, this and then that and then that, as if he were telling us about it. Deliberately he only shows us so much, so that we are made curious to find out what more there is, and surprised at how very tall the tree turns out to be. The climb, unlike the tree, is itself sequential, but Flaherty's rendering of it is sequential in a way that the climb is not. Deliberately he allows the boy to leave our view, so that our interest is drawn to where the boy has gone, the space we are yet to see above the frame; if the camera had moved up the tree along with the boy, closely following the sequence of the climb, then the boy climbing, something continuously on screen, would have been the chief object of our interest. Like a man telling a story, Flaherty plays upon our expectations of more to come, our sense that the information he has given us is incomplete, and to be continued.

Words in a narrative mediate between us and the world they tell us about. They are someone's words, giving us not what happened but an account of what happened, someone's choice of what to tell. A play enacted on the stage is not an account; it is what is happening in the only place where things can happen, the stage before us. Of course someone made the choice of what to put there; but once it is actually there, before us without mediation, it becomes a fact, excluding all other possibilities, no longer a matter of choice. Narrative is always a matter of choice, because the world is larger than anyone's account of it; but in a play the world is the stage. The sequence that a narrator makes is an operation performed on the world, an enumeration of certain things in it; the sequence that we get in a play is a presented fact. It is there on the stage and it is all there is; a play is complete like a painting.

Like the words of a narrator, the camera mediates between us

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and the world. But the camera is much more direct than words: its mediation is peculiarly immediate. What is on the screen is what is happening, not there before us directly, like a play, but there before the camera, directly reproduced by it. The camera makes no choices: it gives us whatever is there before it. What is on the screen is a fact, not an account. It is through our awareness of what is not on the screen, our sense of a larger world of which we are only being shown so much, that a film gets to be like a narrative.

A scene in *Pépé le Moko,* a French gangster movie made in 1937 by Julien Duvivier, has Pépé and a woman reminiscing about Paris in an Algerian cafe. They tell each other the names of places in the city they both miss; we get a shot of him as he mentions a place, then of her as she mentions another, back and forth, until, at the same time, they both mention the Metro, and then we see them together in the same shot. Imagine this scene as Lumière would have done it: that last shot of Pépe and the woman together would have been held throughout, a shot framing squarely in one view all the elements of the scene, no less and no more, closing it off in space as beginning at the beginning and ending at the end would have closed it off in time. Lumière's scene, presented from a single encompassing point of view, closed off as if it were all there is, would not have been much different from a scene on the stage. Duvivier's technique, his cutting back and forth, is certainly not stagy. Yet he does in each of his shots the same thing Lumière would have done in his one shot: have the duration and the framing match as nearly as possible the action that is shown. Each of the shots in Duvivier's scene begins at the beginning and ends at the end of a line of dialogue, and it frames the person who is saying that line, the two persons in the last shot. The effect, as in Lumière, is a closing off: we are meant to be concerned with just this, the action there on the screen, not to consider what else could have been shown. Duvivier's cutting does not make a sequence that is not in the scene; what it does is give a finer matching of the exchange of remembered places than would have been possible in a single static shot. It does what would have been done in *Moana* if a continuous camera movement had followed the movement of the boy up the tree: closely direct our attention to a sequence that is there. This kind of film technique is an intensification, a narrowing down, of what is done on the stage: presenting the fact of a sequence to the exclusion of all other possibilities. Of course we know that we are

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not being shown everything, that Pépé is there when we only see the woman and that the woman is there when we only see Pépé; but we get the feeling that we are being shown all that matters, the right thing at the right time. Duvivier's technique is an example of what may be called the dramatic, as opposed to the narrative, approach to film construction.

Imagine Duvivier's scene as his compatriot and contemporary Jean Renoir would have done it: all in one fixed shot, probably, but not a self-contained shot in the manner of Lumière. Typically Renoir would have given us an off-center view of the scene, maybe even leaving out most of Pépé's body, allowing him to lean forward into the frame and to lean back out of it, or maybe showing us a section of another table in the cafe and letting us overhear part of another conversation; and Renoir typically might have begun his shot before Pépé and the woman sit down at their table, or ended it after they get up and leave. Renoir, in any case, would have opened up the scene, calling attention to what is not on the screen: that too may matter, we are always made to feel in his films, not just this being shown. In a Renoir film of the 1930's—less so in his work since then—the action continually overflows our view of it, entering and leaving on all sides, pointing to what is left out, making us conscious that it could have been brought in but for a matter of choice. In the party at the chateau in *Rules of the Game*, the action is complicated: masters and servants chasing back and forth, lovers coupling and uncoupling, things going on all over the place and intruding on one another—too much, we feel, for the camera to cover it all. But consider a scene in *Boudu Saved from Drowning* where the action is simple: a tramp, sad over the loss of his dog, is just walking along a street by the Seine. Even here Renoir shows this in such a way, with the street traffic coming between us and the tramp, the camera not keeping pace with his motion and eventually allowing him to leave frame, that we are made to feel the incompleteness of our view of it.

It was the generally held opinion at the time that Renoir's technique was a little clumsy compared with Duvivier's: the camera, it was thought, ought to keep up with the action. But the sense conveyed in a Renoir film, as in a narrative, is of a world larger than any rendering given of it: as a narrator can only tell us so much about what happened, so the camera can only keep up with so much of what is happening. A shot doesn't show just the right

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thing because there is no right thing, only someone's choice of what to show; a cut is not made at just the right time because there is no right time, only someone's choice of when to cut; we don't get a close matching of the action because no action is the right one to match. Renoir, like a narrator, gives us a sequence that is his arrangement, his account of the world; Duvivier, like a dramatist, gives us a sequence that is there, closed off from the rest.

That a narrative sequence is an open-ended arrangement, without the unity of a thing whole or an action complete, has bothered people, from Aristotle, who thought tragedy a higher form than epic because it was more of a piece, to Henry James, for whom the work of Tolstoy, let alone Sterne, was inadmissibly rambling. In his own work James managed a kind of dramatic unity, by bringing the narrator inside the action, having him be a character in it who tells what happened from his point of view, so that his account is itself to be taken as something that happened, a fact of the story he is part of. We are confined, in James, to a kind of stage, what one participant in a given situation is in a position to tell. Imagine Renoir's shot of the tramp walking in *Boudu Saved from Drowning*, preceded, or followed, by a shot of another character who is across the street looking on at the tramp from the same position as the camera. Then we would have been led to take our partial view of the tramp as being just what that other character sees of him, to attribute the incompleteness of what is shown, the account given of the action, to the point of view of a participant. The effect would have been a James-like dramatization of Renoir's shot, with any alternatives closed off, his choice of what to show turned into the fact that a character saw it. This technique—the "point-of-view shot" through a character's eyes—is rarely used by Renoir, not in keeping with his narrative approach; it is, of course, common in the dramatic approach to film-making, in the work, for example, of Alfred Hitchcock.

In contrast to Henry James, a novelist who sought to dramatize, Bertolt Brecht was a dramatist who sought to narrate. Consider the scene in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in which Grusha, hesitant about rescuing the abandoned child, is drawn to him, goes over and stays with him through the night, until in the morning she picks him up and takes him with her. Brecht has this played in pantomime, with a singer alongside telling about it in the words of a song, which refer to Grusha in the third person and to what is happening in the

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past tense. ("As if it was stolen goods she picked it up./As if she was a thief she crept away.") Here the song is plainly a narrative, but it is also a performance by the singer, a kind of representation of the action; juxtaposed with the other representation, the performance in pantomime by the actress who plays Grusha, it has the effect of turning that too into a kind of narrative, an alternative account of the same action. The action, what happens in the scene, is not to be identified with either way of playing it on the stage, the song or the pantomime, two different versions calling each other into question, throwing open in our minds the possibility of other ways in which that action could have been played. We are, by an "alienation effect," distanced from the played scene, as the played scene is distanced, made distinct, from what happens in the scene being played. We are prevented, in Brecht, from taking the enactment for the action: the action is not performed, no longer there on the stage, but referred to by the performance. The convention of performance, the convention that the stage is to stand for the world, is undone by the alienation effect, and the stage made to refer to the world, turned into a medium of narrative.

This isn't, as some have thought, just a discarding of the room with a missing fourth wall, the naturalistic convention. To be sure, Brecht was against the illusion of reality on the stage, but more generally he was against, in whatever mode of performance, the self-sufficiency of the stage as a substitute reality. This amounts to, as he insisted himself, a rejection of dramatic form, of the procedure Aristotle described in the *Poetics*: presenting before us a played action that is complete. A model Brecht proposed for his "epic theater" is a street scene where an eyewitness to a traffic accident demonstrates to others how it happened, acting out what he can to give a picture. No one watching his demonstration will take it for the action—not for the accident itself, of course, but not for an acceptable substitute either, a complete picture. Clearly we have here a narrative situation, an account given of what happened by acting it out: a model for a theater where the playing functions as a means of reporting the action rather than presenting it. What makes the street scene function as narrative is not anything it contains, any particular way it is performed, but the spectator's awareness of what it is not—that it is not the accident, that it is only a partial enactment of it, that another eyewitness to the same event would give a different enactment. The sense of incompleteness, of what is not being played, which the spectator has

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in the street scene, Brecht sought to induce in the theater: a sense of the play not as a presented whole but as a series of fragments, a narrative sequence, someone's choice of what to play to give an account of the action. Brecht's practice of staging with vivid concreteness some things in a scene while others are markedly left out; his use of interruption and incongruity to break the consistency of a presentation; the discontinuous construction of his plays, the gaps left open between scenes which are discrete, "each for itself": all these strategies serve to call attention to what is not on the stage, where the playing comes short of a full portrayal and leaves room for an alternative. The alienation effect is not a style of performance but the negation of the performance by making the spectator aware of what it is not.

Like the surface of a painting, the stage is an area which traditionally has been set apart from the world we inhabit. It is, by convention, to be taken not as a piece of this world but as a realm of its own, separate and self-contained, a space of representation closed off from the surrounding space of reality. By an equivalent convention we are to take, in a film, the area framed in each shot, the particular piece of the world which we see reproduced on the screen, as the piece which is significant and need concern us at the moment: the screen then becomes, like the stage, an ideal space of representation. Since Aristotle, it has been a prevalent view that all art is otherworldly in the same way, marking off a territory of its own, setting up its medium of imitation as an ideal realm parallel to reality where the work of art can come into being as a self-sufficient whole. But it is not the case when we listen to a man telling a story that he is apart from us like an actor on the stage. He addresses us from the same space where we stand: the words he uses as his medium of imitation are uttered from a place in this world. Written down, printed on a page, a narrator's words still belong to our reality—unless they are suspended from it by some convention such as James's assigning them to a participant who addresses us from the space of the story. Here in this world no one's words can claim an ideal adequacy to the things they refer to: any account they give will leave a remainder of things untold. By our awareness of that remainder, what is left out of the account—where it falls short of Aristotle's norm of completion—we recognize the mediation characteristic of narrative, the presence of a teller between us and the tale.

Brecht was a materialist who did away with the stage as an ideal

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space and brought that area back into the realm of our reality. The negation of the performance by the alienation effect is a dialectical negation of a negation: an undoing of the convention that we are to shut out of our minds, while the performance goes on, all reality outside the stage. That piece of the world set apart from it to produce drama is reinstated in it to produce narrative: brought back into this world, Brecht's stage is back as a space of mediation. Movies, it is true, aren't confined like plays to a designated area and can roam the world; still, what they can show of it is only a piece at a time, and only so many pieces in the course of a film. By a kind of dramatic convention, watching a film we are to grant those pieces special status and agree to their being cut off from the rest of reality. We go along with having our perception confined, while each shot is on the screen, to just so much of the world as is reproduced in that shot: whether a broad overview or a close-up of a small detail, that is the piece which is supposed to matter at the moment. Like the convention of performance, this convention of the shot is a negation of the world outside a space of representation; like the scenes in a play, the succession of shots in a film can then present an action which is complete. Jean Renoir was Brecht's friend and one of the intended members (Eisenstein was another) of the "Diderot Society" proposed by Brecht to bring together people working in theater and film toward a "newer, anti-metaphysical and social art." We have all heard Renoir described as warm and accepting, Brecht as cool and critical. Even though one would want to quarrel with these clichés, point out the compassion in *Mother Courage* and the detachment in *Rules of the Game,* one cannot dispute that Brecht and Renoir are artists of very different temperament. Yet they have in common the undoing of that ideal space where everything significant is supposed to be presented; they both bring about a negation of that negation of the surrounding space of reality. By drawing our interest to what is not on the screen, making us notice the omission from our view of things which may be as important as those included, Renoir denies his shots any special status, any claim of ideal adequacy to the things they reproduce, and reinstates them to their place as fragments of a larger reality. Like Brecht's stage, Renoir's screen is turned into a space of mediation.

A scene in *Cronaca di un Amore,* Michelangelo Antonioni's first feature film, has the two main characters, the wife of a Milanese

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industrialist and the man who had been before her marriage and is now again her lover, discussing in a hotel room what to do about her husband. We see them in a held mid-shot as she suggests that her husband could die and puts her hands around her lover's neck to simulate strangling; repelled by the idea of murder, he pushes her away from him, and as she moves toward the back wall the camera starts to move, not following her motion but in the opposite direction, away from the two of them until we see them in long shot. With this shot now held, he remains standing, mostly silent, while she paces toward the camera and back toward the wall, talking about the husband she dislikes and the money she doesn't want to give up. Before long, even though they are still undecided about what to do, the two lovers embrace and kiss, and at this point the camera again starts to move, again not toward them but in the opposite direction, further away from the kissing couple as the scene fades out.

As in the scene with the boy climbing the coconut tree in *Moana,* the way the camera here twice pauses and then moves is in noticeable discrepancy with the action depicted. The mediating presence of the camera in each scene is established by that discrepancy—a conflict, as Eisenstein would have called it—between what is happening in the scene and the rendering given of it on the screen. In Flaherty the discrepancy is between the section of space being shown and the larger physical area we are made interested in seeing: as elsewhere in *Moana* and in *Nanook of the North,* his strategy is one of gradual revelation, arousing and then satisfying our curiosity to see more of the physical world. Flaherty's use of the camera is descriptive, in an old narrative tradition of which he was perhaps the last major exponent, that of the man who has been to faraway places and comes back to tell us about them. Antonioni's purpose in moving the camera away from the lovers is not mainly descriptive—to show us more of the hotel room—but connotative—to show us the lovers from a different perspective which modifies our response to their situation. The discrepancy we notice in Antonioni is between the dramatic interaction in the scene and the point of view adopted by the camera. We are pulled back from the characters at the very moments of emotional intensity, moments when, to serve the drama, that intensity would usually have been confirmed with a closer view: a close-up of his face when he pushes her away, a camera movement following her toward the wall, an intimate two-shot when they make up and kiss—a view which matches what

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the characters are feeling. As in the words of a narrator, in the placement of Antonioni's camera we recognize a point of view which is distinct from the action and able to give it a changed connotation. Rather than confirming the emotions acted out in the scene, the moving back of the camera goes against them—discouraging our involvement with the characters, inducing with regard to them, by the greater physical distance, an attitude of critical detachment. This is an alienation effect, achieved by means different from Brecht's but still based, like many of his devices, on a deliberate incongruity, a camera placement which is at odds with the action. Antonioni's portrayal of alienation in modern life has been much discussed, without note being taken that he treats it not as a subject of empathy but of critical scrutiny—that we are alienated from the alienated through the operation of his camera.

Any shot in a film shows things from, literally, a point of view, exactly as they appear from the point in space where the camera has been put. But usually, with dramatic film technique, the convention of the shot is enforced, and we are led to accept the appropriateness of the camera placement to the things shown. For that physical perspective to function as a narrative point of view we must be made to recognize its particularity, how that angle or distance, the choice to show us that one aspect of appearances, modifies our impression of things which would look different from another perspective. A kind of alienation effect is required, a dissociation of the camera from the things before it to establish its placement as an independent choice. This is the effect Antonioni achieves by holding a shot for an extra moment, lingering over a view we might have just accepted until it begins to seem strange; by a mobile camera continually redirecting our attention, turning from one aspect to another along a course of its own; by suddenly cutting to a disorienting angle, a new perspective on things from which they appear unexpectedly different. Always in his films we are made to sense what the photographer in *Blow-Up* is brought up against: the incompleteness of any view of appearances, the inconclusiveness of any perspective. We recognize a mediating point of view, in a camera placement as in words, by our awareness that there are other points of view equally possible—that the account given leaves a remainder.

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JOHN SIMON

Theater Chronicle

How depressing that Heinrich von Kleist's dramatic masterpiece, *The Prince of Homburg* (1811), had to wait 155 years for its professional American premiere! It fell to the worthy Robert Kalfin and his Chelsea Theater Center to fill the gap—wretchedly, alas. A shameful lacuna was filled with a shabby travesty.

Kleist's *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg* represents the achievement of what, for all his genius, he had been vainly striving for: the acceptance of reality, reconciliation with the world. In Kleist's previous dramas (the comedies are somewhat, but not fundamentally, different) the self-absorbed protagonist founders in the conflict with the Other, whether that other be a person, a system, the world. In *The Prince of Homburg*, the imperfect hero—imperfect as all real-life heroes are—corroborates the world's verdict against him and so works out his salvation in this life. And to think that in the very year he wrote this mature work Kleist killed himself in a suicide pact with Henriette Vogel.

Briefly, the plot of the play is as follows. It is 1675, the eve of the battle of Fehrbellin against the invading Swedes. Young Prince Arthur Friedrich of Homburg (in reality he was much older and quite different) is a somnambulist sitting in the garden and weaving a laurel wreath for himself in a waking dream. The Elector of Brandenburg, his uncle and sovereign, plays a little game with him: he interweaves his own gold chain with the wreath, and has Princess Natalie, the nominal commander of the Prince's regiment, present this now combined symbol of fame, power, and love to the young man. In the process of reaching for the young woman, whom he has never met, the Prince strips off her glove; awaking, he considers the glove an earnest of the truthfulness of his dream. When, next morning, the Elector's battle plan is read out, the Prince does not listen, lost in contemplation of Natalie who claims the glove he has dropped at her feet.

In the battle, the Prince disobeys orders, despite the urgent reminder of old Colonel Kottwitz that he wait for the Elector's command before charging with his cavalry. The Prince charges prematurely, but wins the day. It is arguable whether the prescribed wait would have brought defeat or an even more crushing victory. In any case, the Elector's military tribunal condemns the Prince to death for insubordination. At first, the imprisoned Homburg flippantly expects to be set free forthwith; Count Hohenzollern, his friend and companion at arms, visits him in his cell and convinces him the firing squad has been picked and Natalie, though she seems to be in love with someone else, is being offered in a political marriage to the king of Sweden. Homburg, granted a brief leave from his cell, goes to throw himself at the feet of the Elector's wife in a state of panic and abjection; right in front of Natalie, he relinquishes all his claims to her, if only his life will be spared. Natalie, who loves him, is shocked by his

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cravenness, but hurries off to the Elector for a last attempt at a pardon. The Elector is genuinely astounded to hear of the Prince's collapse; he thought the young man would proudly accept martial law as behooves a Prussian officer and gentleman. He grants the Prince a conditional pardon in a letter Natalie is to convey to him in his cell: Homburg need only reply with a couple of words stating he considers his punishment unjust, and it will be rescinded.

But as Natalie rightly fears, the Prince, initially overjoyed, soon realizes that he cannot claim he was done an injustice. Struggling with himself, and with the decision placed into his hands, the Prince matures and nobly declines the reprive. Deeply stirred and more in love than ever, Natalie gives the go-ahead to the officers of her regiment to deliver a petition to the Elector and also plead for the Prince *viva voce*; if that fails, rebellion is contemplated. Old Kottwitz, the faithful soldier, is first to present his argument to the Elector: the cause a true soldier serves is that of the fatherland, of which the Elector is only the symbol. Confronted with potential victory, even he, Kottwitz, would grab at it regardless of orders, knowing full well that his head would be forfeit. This is a curious argument, since the Prince acted out of lust for glory and unwilling to be judged for it, and also since, by Kottwitz's very words, the insubordinate head *should* fall to the crown. But the Elector does not argue with Kottwitz; instead, he sends for the Prince. Now Hohenzollern puts forth a somewhat sophistic argument: if the Elector had not played his little ambition-begetting game with the sleeping Prince, this would not have happened, so the real culprit is the Elector. But the latter points out that it was Hohenzollern who led the company into the garden, so the fault is, according to this silly argument, really his.

The Prince arrives and impassionedly proclaims the justness of his doom; he merely asks the Elector that Natalie be allowed to marry whom she will. This corresponds to Natalie's earlier offer to the Elector, whereby she gave up all claims to Homburg, if only he were pardoned. Without giving his reasons, the Elector tears up the verdict. The Prince is led blindfolded to what he takes to be the place of execution; instead, it is the castle garden from the first scene in which he is now truly offered the laurel interwoven with the gold chain, and Natalie's hand. Coming to after having fainted, the Prince exclaims, "No, say, is it a dream?" Kottwitz responds, "A dream, what else?" All prepare for a renewed attack on the Swedes and exit shouting, "Into the dust with the foes of Brandenburg!"

This synopsis does scant justice to the subtle psychological insights, the unexpected but compelling twists of plotting, the sublime poetry (at once epic and lyrical) of the play. Yet this is a work that has long been misunderstood—and not only crudely, as by the Prussian authorities, who banned it for half a century because of "the unworthy general Homburg." No, reputable critics have, to this day, objected to one or another of its salient virtues. Even Hebbel, the distinguished playwright who was in many ways Kleist's dramatic heir, while recognizing the unique greatness

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of the work, considered the opening and closing scenes gratuitous romantic arabesques, and disapproved of the scene in which the Prince's absorption with Natalie causes him not to hear properly the plan of battle. Hebbel felt that Homburg's impetuosity, hunger for glory, and wish to lay the victor's laurel at Natalie's feet were reasons enough for his disobedience.

Not so. The prologue and epilogue are needed for the author's moral and metaphysical purpose: that the hero's (for which read poet's, indeed Kleist's) dream of glory can be realized if it is clung to steadfastly. True, when the somnambulistic Prince tries to latch on to Natalie, the Elector pushes him away: "Ins Nichts mit dir zurück, Herr Prinz von Homburg,/ Ins Nichts, ins Nichts! In dem Gefild der Schlacht/ Sehen wir, wenns dir gefällig ist, uns wieder!/ Im Traum erringt man solche Dinge nicht!" Here let us glance at how James Kirkup, whose translation the Chelsea production used with some small modifications by Kalfin, deals with this rather simple passage: "Back! Back into the darkness, Frederick, Prince of Homburg!/ Back into the dark and nothingness!/ If you will grace us with your presence,/ We shall meet again upon the field of battle./ Victory cannot be won by dreams!" What ghastly translating! The first line is a hexameter; the second, third and fifth are clumsy tetrameters or, at best, awkwardly catalectic, rhythmless pentameters. Moreover, four lines are turned into five with undue prolixity. Worst of all, tone and meaning are faulty. "If you will grace us with your presence" replaces light irony with heavy sarcasm; and it is not victory alone that one cannot capture in dreams, but "such things," which include fame, love, happiness. The translation might better read: "Back into nothingness, Sir Prince of Homburg!/ Into nothing, nothing. On the field of battle/ We'll meet, if it so pleases you, again!/ Things of this kind cannot be won in dreams!"

Obviously, then, the scene reveals the Prince as a literal and figurative dreamer—an actionless poet who must yet prove himself in deeds. But it also tells of the need to dream the right dreams, and of the incentive—the glove—the noble dream grants him who dreams it. The final scene, or epilogue, is then a beautiful demonstration of how reality confirms the dream once the dreamer—by responsible actions, self-denial, maturity—becomes worthy of it. When the ecstatically incredulous Prince, snatched from death's jaw into fortune's lap, exclaims, "Is this a dream?" it is fitting for the staunchly down-to-earth Kottwitz to reply, "A dream, what else?" When reality rises to the occasion, it is a dream come true. As for the Prince's inattention during the counsel of war, this further illustrates his impractical, self-absorbed, immature personality, while also pointing up the importance to him of romantic love, which will prove an important ingredient of his salvation.

It has been frequently objected that the groveling cowardice of the Prince who, right in front of her, gives up Natalie and loses all dignity just to save his guilty skin, is too much of a flaw for any dramatic hero. But as Karl Viëtor noted, "Chaos threatens behind all Kleistian destinies, for

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primeval forces are unleashed there." May it not be that the very desperate energy with which you hurl yourself into this chaos can become converted into the bounce that catapults you back to the heights of magnanimity?

Here it is necessary to point out two important aspects of the play. One is a parallel, conscious or otherwise, with *Measure for Measure:* the relationship of the Elector to the Prince resembles that of the Duke to Claudio and, to a lesser extent, to Angelo. Both plays are technically comedies, yet they hover on the verge of tragedy; in both plays, it has been argued not unconvincingly, the ruler stands for God and the theme is ultimately man's relationship to the divinity, and the nature of theodicy. But of greater interest to us is the other, no less important, aspect: the profoundly autobiographical nature of the play. In a sense, it is only through knowledge of Kleist's life that one comes to full appreciation of the nobility of this work. Thus one should know that, despite great gifts and heroic efforts, Kleist was a failure as an officer, scholar, littérateur, dramatist, journalist-editor, lover, brother and son. Never an ignoble failure, to be sure; rather one cursed by historical circumstance and bad luck—incomprehension not only by the public but also by his foremost contemporary, Goethe. And cursed also by a powerfully self-destructive trait: fascination with death.

Kleist's absentmindedness was proverbial; hence also the abstractedness of the Prince. Heinrich was always on the brink of financial disaster, often in dire poverty. His family, notably his father, wanted him to be preferably an officer; failing that, a civil servant. At both of these, including the newspaper business, Kleist tried his hand but failed. This may be implied by the two previous battles in which, the Elector says, Homburg let him down. Kleist was a passionate enemy of Napoleon and, like the Prince, champion of the German cause; at the very end of his life, he was trying again, unsuccessfully, to re-enlist. Early on, he had broken off his engagement to a decent and devoted girl, who nevertheless, as he rightly felt, could not understand and participate in the convolutions of his genius. By way of compensation, perhaps, Princess Natalie proves an unconscious counterpart to the tempestuous Homburg (Kleist) when she encourages a potential rebellion of her regiment to save the Prince's life. To Homburg's bowing down to the Elector's verdict corresponds Kleist's final return to his family and attempt at a reconciliation, which ended in renewed estrangement, lack of sympathy even from Ulrike, the stepsister who had been the writer's frequent companion and financial as well as moral support. This falling out was terrible, but so was much else in Kleist's life: on three separate occasions, for instance, he was unjustly jailed on the suspicion of being a spy, once on no stronger grounds than his lingering with great interest at the site of a former battle. And what of Goethe, whom Kleist revered, refusing to produce his plays at Weimar because of what he called Kleist's *Verwirrung der Gefühle*, his emotional disarray? Yet *The Prince of Homburg* is, as Bernt von Heiseler put it in *Ahnung und Aussage*, precisely a *Klärung* of feelings: a clarification, or chastening.

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Kleist despaired. "Hell gave me my halfway talents; heaven bestows on man a full talent or none." To his fiancée he wrote on one occasion: "I had an ineffable yearning to receive a single drop of joy: a whole sea of it seemed poured out over creation, only I went forth empty." He realized his own failings, as Homburg was finally to realize his; he wrote, for instance, about a chasm thrown in his way "by my temperament—and is not that my destiny?" His three wishes, at one point, were "freedom, my own house and wife . . . I repeat them to myself at sunrise and sunset as a monk does his three vows." Later, the three shrank to one, to finish his first play: "This one wish heaven shall grant me, then let it do as it pleases." Self-critically again he complained in a letter: "However busy my imagination is confronted with white paper, and certain of contour and color as are the figures it then bodies forth, so hard, indeed so painful is it for me to imagine what really is." About love relations he wrote, "A coming closer is not even to be imagined; all that one can achieve is remaining in the spot where one stands." Finally he met Henriette Vogel, a young married woman incurably ill. They saw each other little but exchanged letters of orgiastic exaltation, formed a suicide pact and, at Wannsee near Potsdam, on November 21, 1811, the thirty-four-year-old Kleist shot first Henriette, then himself. "Through contact with hers," he wrote, "my soul has become wholly ripe for death . . . . I die because there was nothing left for me on earth to learn or acquire."

Most moving are the last words to Ulrike dated "On the morning of my death": ". . . You have done for me, let me not say what is within the strength of a sister but what is within that of a man to save me; the truth is that there was no helping me on earth. And now farewell; may heaven bestow on you a death only half the equal of mine in joy and inexpressible merriment; that is the fondest and most ardent wish I can summon up for you." Why shouldn't he have despaired? He never even got to see one of his plays performed—in which he was like the other great nineteenth-century German dramatic genius, Georg Büchner. But Büchner lived to be only twenty-three and wrote only three plays; Kleist lived eleven years longer and wrote eight works for the stage. Like Henriette's condition, Kleist's gifts must have appeared to their owner as an incurable illness. Yet *The Prince of Homburg* is a healthy work; rightly has Erwin Laaths remarked, "As a shaping spirit, the poet triumphed; as a shaky human being, he went under."

Clearly, then, *The Prince of Homburg* was Kleist's desperate attempt to cure himself, to transcend his weaknesses in the person of his alter ego. It was also the creation of an ideal beloved for himself. Above all, it was a vindication of his dream-entranced nature. And, most touchingly perhaps, it was the creation of a father-substitute in the Elector, through whom the real-life father might recognize Heinrich's virtues, his potential for shining elevation above his floundering. In his *Heinrich von Kleist*, Friedrich Koch correctly notes a parallel between the play and the parable of the Prodigal Son.

The Elector has been criticized as a bewildering, insufficiently realized

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figure, especially by those critics who see the play as a mere confrontation between the individual and the state, as a plea that each recognize and respect the rights of the other. True, the Elector's behavior remains ultimately unsoundable: the exact reason for the pardon remains unvoiced. As Hans Heinz Holz wrote in *Macht und Ohnmacht der Sprache*, "What is most important fulfills itself silently, allowing of several interpretations." Obviously, though, the Elector is guiding the Prince toward self-control on the one hand, and a greater sense of responsibility on the other. When he demands that he hold his cavalry charge until ordered to make it, he is testing his self-restraint; but what makes Homburg finally grow up is the Elector's placing the choice between life and death into his hands by letting him decide whether his condemnation should stand or not. This is the masterstroke of an enlightened father. Forcefully, the God-man parallel suggests itself: God gives man freedom of will, but this free will must be exercised within the limits of what reality and the world demand of it—must freely bow down before the wisdom of necessity.

Yet it is not only the acceptance of a higher necessity that testifies to the Prince's ripeness; it is also his attitude toward love. The same Homburg who once pusillanimously repudiated Natalie to save himself, now, on the verge of death asks nothing for himself, requests only that Natalie be allowed freedom to marry whom she will. Does the Elector perhaps respond also to this nobility of a loving heart? Or is he moved by the filial love the Prince expresses for a father who is condemning him to death? Or is it the way the Prince quells the lowering rebellion? The Elector does not explain his clemency; his ways, like God's, are inscrutable. As Koch sees it, Kleist thrusts forward with this play from the realm of tragic space in which he, like all his creations, has lived into a supratragic space.

Even this cursory discussion should have made clear that the play is complex and multilayered: psychological, political, existential, autobiographical, and metaphysical. Right off the bat, the Chelsea production was hampered by a tiny stage and tight budget: one of the musts of any production of *Homburg* is panoply—a sense of the grandeur of the Prussian state, which comes to signify order, law, the real world. In a cramped space, with paltry costumes and a unit set with puny slide projections to suggest the changing scenes, this grandeur could not be conveyed, especially not with a cast cut down to eleven players—enough for a soccer game, but not for the majestic panorama of *The Prince of Homburg*. Ruth Morley's costumes were not even in good taste, with the Prince mostly in gray, wearing hip boots made out of a particularly offensive blue-gray patent leather.

Kalfin took some liberties with the text that are defensible, such as placing Hohenzollern's casuistic plea for clemency before Kottwitz's more powerful one; other interventions, however, proved untenable. He ended the play, for example, on a stunning *coup de théâtre*: as the Army hoists the exalted Prince on their shoulders, Kalfin substituted a lookalike for the actual Prince; still another double was seated on the projecting lip of the stage (DS right) where the sleeping Prince sat at the rise of the curtain,

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and was, like him, winding a laurel wreath. The real Prince then came in CS left to contemplate his past and present selves, bemused and also elated. A lovely effect but quite inappropriate; we must see a Prince who is a whole man now, not neurotically split into three personas. Worse yet, Kalfin invented bits of stage business for the actors that made no sense, as when Homburg in his cell played with an apple he kept tossing in the air, like the Moor in *Petrouchka* his coconut. When Hohenzollern arrived with his message of doom, the two men pitched that apple back and forth between them, like ball players warming up for a game. Of course, this may have been done at the performers' request: American actors tend to be at a loss when all they are given to work with is sublime poetry. Their very bearing is unsuited to costume plays, period sense and history remaining as untaught as verse speaking. Even a slightly elaborate prose style passes for something recondite and unspeakable. Our actors look in period plays like a bunch of unhappy time travelers who have lost the formula that would take them back to the twentieth century. This is true even of most of our better actors; how much more so of the inexpensive ones Chelsea is forced to dredge up.

Actually, the Prince was played by a fairly "expensive" actor, Frank Langella, who, on paper, might seem a good choice for the role. Tall, dark, and handsome, Langella started out a number of years ago in off-Broadway productions like *The White Devil* and Lowell's *Benito Cereno*; soon he was portraying the young Shakespeare at Lincoln Center in *A Cry of Players*. Since then, he has shuttled between classic and contemporary works, recently winning several awards as the male salamander in Albee's *Seascape*. Alas, one of the troubles with Langella's performances is that while they all, regardless of the part, come out plentifully salamandrine (if that is the word), they do not come out very male. The actor lacks virility and projects narcissistic self-gratification rather than outgoingness. He is given to pursing his bee-stung mouth and, possibly by way of compensation, pulling his lids back as far as they will go, so as to make his eyes as big and round as archery targets, and just as inexpressive.

Langella delivers his lines with clarity, but often with excessive sweetness, like that extra spoonful of sugar that ruins your cup of coffee. His movements, though not inelegant, have a certain flaccidity which he sometimes tries to disguise with gymnastic outbursts that overshoot their mark. Take the moment in prison when the Prince is explaining his nonchalance to Hohenzollern and says of the Elector that he would not have gone this far, "Dacht er, mit einem heitern Herrscherspruch, Nicht, als ein Gott, in ihren Kreis zu treten," and, after that, to pardon him. Kirkup translates: "How could he do it, if he did not intend/ To step among them [the judges], like a deus ex machina,/ At the last moment and reprieve me with a joke?" Aside from the prolix and arhythmic prosaism of the translation, note the inadequacy of rendering *heiterer Herrscherspruch* as "a joke," and, still worse, turning *als ein Gott* into the perfectly anachronistic and un-Kleistian "deus ex machina." At these words, Langella was directed to leap up on his prison bench—though not,

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I should think, to strike a campy attitude. This was not the leap of a god, from the machine or elsewhere, but rather that of a swish (not Swiss) mountain goat. (Let me mention, by the way, that in the verses that follow Kirkup abandons all semblance of pentameter for amorphous hepta- and even octameters!)

Now take Jane Staab, who played the Elector's wife like any old fishwife. Having won the Best Actress Award at Northwestern University whose drama department, thanks to Alvina Krause, used to be justly famous, Miss Staab went on to play a large variety of classical roles in the regional theater—yet here she was moving about the stage without a trace of dignity and elegance, to say nothing of aristocratic hauteur. Or consider Patricia Elliott, the Natalie. Neither young nor attractive enough for the part, Miss Elliott has done well enough in contemporary comedies and musicals; here she lacked style, poetry, a commanding presence. She conveyed neither strong passion nor deep despair, and could not even cry on cue, a feat much less hard for the histrionic-hysteric temperament than impressionable theatergoers assume. Much worse yet were those Chelsea regulars, Roger DeKoven and George Morfogen as Kottwitz and Hohenzollern, respectively. DeKoven last played an old bum in the Chelsea's *Ice Age*, and here he precisely duplicated that performance. As for Morfogen, his Prussian count was a typical Jewish tailor, except when he pleaded for Homburg's life and seemed to imitate the courtroom manner of Louis Nizer.

The only acceptable performance was that of K. Lype O'Dell, who was actually promoted from a lesser role to that of the Elector. O'Dell has a forceful delivery and a substantial presence including good deportment. Unfortunately, he looks somewhat common and cannot quite manage an aristocratic tone; certainly there is nothing Prussian about him. One applauds Robert Kalfin's taste and acumen in bringing *The Prince of Homburg* finally onto the American stage, but between no production at all and one such as this I frankly don't know which is worse.

Harold Pinter's *No Man's Land* places its author even lower on my scale, on which he never rated very high. In earlier Pinter plays, even if one could not discern a clear meaning, one could still follow the general drift. Now there is no longer any reason for anything, though an occasional bit of rhyme does pop up. It is interesting to note that Pinter, who began as a brazen imitator of Beckett and Ionesco (the latter, by the way, has spoken to me of him with total disparagement—though of whom, these days, does Ionesco speak undisparagingly?), finally found something like his own voice in a couple of plays, only to lose it again as he tries harder than ever to duplicate Beckett's "crazy" poetry. But in Pinter the craziness always has an elucubrated, manipulative, *voulu* quality about it, whereas the poetry fails to materialize altogether.

In *No Man's Land*, Hirst, an elderly, rich man of letters, has brought home with him Spooner, an equally elderly but poor poet, whom he picked up on Hampstead Heath. They make fitful conversation, with Spooner chattering away self-promotingly and sycophantically, and Hirst

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mostly asking laconically for refills as they keep drinking. Then Hirst starts falling over, and proceeds to crawl out of the room. Foster appears—an impertinent and unsavory young man who seems to be Hirst's secretary—followed shortly by Briggs, middle-aged and apparently the butler. Their behavior to Spooner is vaguely threatening, and certainly patronizing. They talk all kinds of nonsense until Hirst returns in a robe, to blither mostly about a dream of someone drowning and about his wonderful photograph album full of his past. Briggs and Foster bully him and clearly live off him; the three of them may also have a homosexual *ménage*. Spooner suddenly offers his services to Hirst, who is then led away by Briggs, whereupon Foster locks Spooner into the room for the night.

In the second act it is morning and Briggs serves Spooner a lavish breakfast (supposedly intended for a financial adviser who did not show up) including champagne, regales him with a cock-and-bull story about how he met Foster, and reveals that Hirst and Foster are likewise poets. When Hirst comes in, again immaculately dressed, it emerges that he and Spooner, who did not know each other in Act I, have been acquaintances since their Oxford undergraduate days, though Hirst calls Spooner by a different name. They reminisce about people and places they have in common, and it comes out that Hirst has had an affair with Spooner's wife, whereas Spooner had with Arabella Hinscott, of whom Hirst was very fond, "a form of an affair. She had no wish for full consummation. She was content with her particular predilection. Consuming the male member." Hirst and Spooner now become menacing toward each other, and soon Briggs and Foster become minatory as Spooner offers himself as secretary to Hirst and rattles off a long list of unlikely aptitudes. Hirst suggests that they change the subject, and adds "for the last time." Whereupon Briggs and Foster convince Hirst that the subject is now winter and, having been changed for the last time, can never be changed again. Now Spooner says to Hirst the very words the latter had drunkenly mumbled in the first act: "You are in no man's land. Which never moves, which never changes, which never grows older, but which remains forever, icy and silent." (A pretty fair definition of Pinter's dramaturgy, but never mind.) There is a silence, then Hirst remarks, "I'll drink to that," as the lights slowly fade. The little glimmer of Pinter's talent has also been slowly fading since his Beckettizing became arrant with *Landscape* and *Silence*.

The non sequiturs run riot in *No Man's Land*. For example, when Spooner inquires about Hirst's wife, he asks Hirst to tell him "How beautiful she was, how tender and how true. Tell me with what speed she swung in the air, with what velocity she came off the wicket, whether she was responsive to finger spin, whether you can bowl a shorter with her, or an offbreak with a legbreak action. In other words, did she google?" The dramatis personae are all named after famous British cricketers, yet the above bit of nonsense is one of only two references to cricket throughout the play. A little later, again out of left field (if I may obtrude a baseball metaphor), Spooner asks a further question about Hirst's wife: "Her eyes,

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I take it, were hazel?" Hirst, drinking, replies: "Hazel shit." To which Spooner: "Good lord, good lord, do I detect a touch of the maudlin. *Pause.* Hazel shit. I ask myself: Have I ever seen hazel shit? Or hazel eyes, for that matter?" A little later, Spooner urges: "You need a friend. You have a long hike, my lad, up which, presently, you slog unfriended. Let me perhaps be your boatman. For if and when we talk of a river, we talk of a deep and dank architecture . . . ."

The verbiage jumps around like that, ceaselessly and meaninglessly. In the thus far most ambitious attempt to justify Pinter's ways to man, *The Pinter Problem* by Austin E. Quigley, the author explains Pinter in terms of the new linguistics. Rather superficially, Wittgenstein and all manner of structural semanticists are adduced in their abstruse jargon; yet when Pinter's utterances, spoken or written, are quoted, both language and meaning are worlds apart from all that learned farrago. Pinter, in fact, denies having read any of it, and, for once, we can believe him. Quigley is full of "the reference theory of language" and "the interrelational theory of language," "the 'when' factor" and other such stuff; when Pinter takes over, however, it sounds like this: "Their [the characters'] tentacles go out very strongly to each other, and I think communication is a very fearful matter." Quite a change in tone, this. And what is the sum total of Quigley's hermeneutics? "If one approaches the plays with a belief that truth, reality and communication ought to conform to certain norms, then the plays will remain tantalizingly enigmatic. But once it is realized that all of these concepts are, like any others, moves in language games, the barrier to an understanding of Pinter is removed." That is a very small fish for Professor Quigley to come up with after so assiduous a dive into Pinter's depths. I must say that *I* never found Pinter's plays tantalizingly enigmatic; I recognized them plainly for the three-dollar bills they were. Nor did I ever believe that truth, reality and communication ought to conform to certain norms; but I did and do believe that plays should conform to certain conceivable, even if not immediately recognizable, notions of truth, reality and communication. What I emphatically reject is that "any other" concepts are mere moves in language games, though I am quite willing to grant that Pinter's concepts are, even if the game is hardly worth the candle.

Pinter introduces some new elements or gamesmanship into *No Man's Land*, to wit a goodly amount of scatology and obscenity, which curiously combines with what smacks of misogyny. Thus the "bad" word used most often and most gratuitously is "cunt," and there are also such remarks as Hirst's to Spooner that he took from Spooner's wife "simply that portion of herself all women keep in reserve, for a rainy day." Another new feature is an attempt at euphuism or what is meant to be a takeoff on "literary" talk; here is Spooner offering himself to Hirst: ". . . My sword shall be ready to dissever all manifest embodiments of malign forces that conspire to your ruin. I shall regard it as incumbent upon me to preserve a clear countenance and a clean conscience . . . . I had rather bury myself in a tomb of honour than permit your dignity to be sullied by domestic enemy

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or foreign foe . . . ." and so on and on, without becoming a specific parody or an amusing enough construct in its own right. There are also stronger homosexual implications than in any previous Pinter play, not excluding even *The Collection* and *The Basement*.

The usual tricks are here again, too. If Hirst and Spooner don't know each other in Act I, you may be sure they will be old friends in Act II; if Hirst does most of the listening in Act I, you may count on his doing most of the talking in Act II; if Spooner is nastily locked in in Act I, he will surely be feasted in Act II. Then there are the reversals within reversals: toward the end of Act II Hirst begins to stop knowing Spooner, whom he calls Wetherby; Briggs, whom he has strangely been calling Denson, he suddenly calls, even more strangely, Albert. Spooner, who has been all along deferential to Hirst, suddenly condescends to him; in the end, out of a clear blue sky, he even sides with his keeper-tormentors. Sometimes these contradictions are of the instant variety, as in Hirst's: "She looked up. I was staggered. I had never seen anything so beautiful. That's all poison. We can't be expected to live like that." And there is, of course, no reason at all for Hirst to accept the notion that he has changed the subject for the last time, and to winter at that. He never mentioned winter.

Oh yes, the play has been beautifully outfitted by John Bury with one of those threateningly perfect sets of his, all fearful symmetry; it is dazzlingly directed by Peter Hall, with silky menace in almost every movement and intonation; and it is acted to perfection by John Gielgud and Ralph Richardson, with the other two actors not far behind. But what does it all amount to? Not even a scorching contest of wills, as in *The Homecoming*; here everyone is either too flabby or too shadowy to register strongly. The formula has frozen into place: menace here, menace there, menace between the lines in the pauses, and the whole thing interspersed with gaudy non sequiturs for cheap laughs. And behind all of it one hears the author's mean-spirited, misanthropic, smugly self-serving cackle.

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ROBERT S. CLARK

Music Chronicle

AT THE FIRST PERFORMANCE of Verdi's *Aida* at the Metropolitan Opera in mid-October of last year, the principals consisted of an English soprano (Rita Hunter), a Russian mezzo-soprano (Elena Obraztsova), an Italian tenor (Carlo Bergonzi), a Canadian baritone (Louis Quilico), and an assortment of American *comprimari* (including an impressive Ramfis by James Morris); a Pole, Kazimierz Kord, conducted. What follows here is principally a consideration of two largely successful and enjoyable evenings during the Paris Opera's visit to New York in September. But I cite the example of the Met performance because it is germane to these.

After years of lassitude and mediocrity, the Paris Opera has reclaimed its standing, with the Met, Covent Garden, La Scala, the Bolshoi, Vienna's Staatsoper, and one or two others, in the select company of international operatic meccas. On the evidence of the productions of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* and Verdi's *Otello* that Paris brought to New York, this is good news, but not entirely. For musically and visually, the two were typical of what might be called Common Market art: handsome, polished, well executed, contemporary in spirit, highly exportable, but lacking a distinctive imprint—whether of a national tradition, a historical time and place, or an overriding musical personality.

It is the stewardship, since 1973, of the Swiss-born composer-administrator Rolf Liebermann, long the intendant of the Hamburg Opera, and of the Hungarian-born conductor Georg Solti, who was in the pit for both the aforementioned New York performances, that has brought about the rise in the Paris Opera fortunes, and it would be obtuse not to concede the magnitude of their achievement. When Liebermann was offered the post, he stipulated that he be allowed to nullify the tenure agreements that protected musicians as well as administrative staff and were generally held to account for the house's low musical estate. Whether or not the remnants of a distinctively French performing tradition departed the Palais Garnier with the Liebermann dismissals I cannot say, though reports have it that very little had survived the years of disarray that preceded him. But the structure Liebermann has built, for all the excellence of the choral singing and orchestral playing to be heard in the New York appearances, is a highly artificial one, the very model of a modern opera house: stylistically almost neutral, presenting the same broadly ranging repertoire as its counterparts and drawing upon the same international pool of leading singers, directors, and set designers. Surely the production of Gounod's *Faust,* the Opera's third New York offering and a natural vehicle for qualities uniquely French, displayed nothing that could not have issued from a company based in New York, London, or Milan (I did not see it, and rely on reports from observers I trust). Perhaps

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if Liebermann had been able, as he at first hoped, to present Paul Dukas' *Ariane et Barbe-bleue,* a recent triumphant revival in Paris, the New York audiences would have had a taste of French style from the source. But it is hard to escape the conclusion that levelling has taken place: the look and the sound of *Figaro* and *Otello* support it. The performances, for all their delights, were more of the international same.

French style is elusive, and our grasp of it has weakened as the number of French operas regularly performed on the world's stages has gradually dwindled to a handful. On the international roster of singing and conducting stars there are few who show any understanding of it (an exception is the American mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade, whose Cherubino in the Paris *Figaro* demonstrated her facility with Mozartean requirements as well). But Italian Romantic—even specifically Verdi—style and Mozart style are the stock in trade of conservatories, coaches, and critics the world over, and no experienced singer or conductor is wholly without knowledge of their rudiments. Both styles are based upon certain customary rhythmic liberties, and upon verbal inflection and coloring. Likewise, each has its "rules" for the attack and release of notes, the use of *portamento* (carrying of the voice or musical line from one note to another), *appoggiature* (grace notes at cadences and elsewhere), and other ornamentation, the suitability of both string and vocal vibrato, and more—and, in the case of Mozart style, the delivery of the recitative. In mastery of all of these things Solti and his Paris crew emerged with hardly a blemish, much superior to the participants in the Met performance of *Aida,* in which the outstanding moments were provided by Elena Obraztsova's accomplished but far from idiomatic-sounding Amneris, and in which even the cast's Italian representative fell short in the management of the legato line.

And yet, especially in *Figaro,* much of Solti's work struck me as—disagreeable but inevitable word!—neutral in tone: clean and correct, fleet, sure, considerate of the singers, but missing any sense of a personal involvement in the musical and dramatic progression he was guiding. Without question this is preferable to a conductor's imposition upon a score of a strong but incoherent or unwarranted personal view—not to mention to the kind of routine and perfunctory conducting Kord gave *Aida.* The danger in leadership like Solti's is that, without characterful vocal performances, the evening will descend to a series of concert arias and ensemble numbers. Fortunately, Solti's singers took up most of the slack. José Van Dam was one of the two or three best Figaros I have ever seen: with a dark-hued, attractive and sonorous baritone voice, he pointed and colored the vocal line to convey more of Figaro's amorousness, joviality, and indignation than has ever come across to me in a theater before; his handling of the recitative was similarly charged with meaning, and if his vocal range were a bit less limited and he did not occasionally resort to bullying and barking the notes, he would be just about irreproachable. As the Count, Gabriel Bacquier was almost a match for Van Dam, and with a voice that frequently showed signs of wear and tear. His Almaviva was a

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lecher, unquestionably, but one with the vulnerabilities of his kind, and with an ironic detachment that rendered him likable. For once the moment in the final act when the Count begs the Countess's forgiveness was not only believable but moving. Michel Sénéchal was an amusing Basilio, and Kurt Moll, possessor of a protean voice reminiscent in color of Boris Christoff in his prime, was an outstanding Dr. Bartolo.

On the whole, the women were less impressive—Von Stade's Cherubino, a wholly convincing characterization, being the best of the three principals. Mirella Freni's Susanna is a reliable commodity: straightforward, pert, girlish, small-scale, it delights but does not mesmerize, titillates but does not surprise. At this, the opening performance of the company's stay, she initially displayed some tendency to sing beneath pitch, but this was remedied as the evening progressed, and was probably the result of nervousness: "*Deh vieni, non tardar,*" Susanna's nocturne in the final act, was sung with bell-like tones perfectly pitched. Margaret Price, a Welsh soprano making her first appearance on New York stages, was at her best in the recitatives and ensembles, in both of which she projected words with a clarity and point that were oddly missing in the Countess's two important arias. These she seemed to shroud with excessive care, as if she were handling some delicate porcelain object; the tone, lovely in quality at other moments during the performance, was rigidly covered, and verbal inflection was so obscured that often I had the impression I was hearing an undifferentiated hoot. Here a current notion of style may actually have been the culprit: in some quarters, proper Mozart singing is thought to require that a large, plangent voice be kept in a straitjacket. Nothing Miss Price did on this evening prepared me for the revelation of her vocal power a week later in *Otello*. Miss Price sang two or three *appoggiature* not generally heard in the Countess's arias, but Solti's treatment of the score in this regard was again standard, neither adventurous nor musicologically cavalier. Giorgio Strehler's direction fit the pattern: in Ezio Frigerio's spaces, attractively decorated and lit but somewhat characterless for rooms in an eighteenth-century Spanish chateau, Strehler arranged fitting tableaux that had the virtues of simplicity and inoffensiveness—and in the context of our time's prevailing spirit of excess in operatic direction, these were precious virtues indeed. What Strehler's direction did was to allow the music and its performers to take the lead in creating the dramatic interplay, and it worked even where there was some suspicion that the performers were not spectacularly endowed with dramatic vision.

The production of *Otello* was less felicitous because more anonymous. Joseph Svoboda, whose hulking staircase brooded over, and nearly subdued, the Metropolitan Opera's production (1974) of Verdi's *I Vespri Siciliani*, surrounded the action of *Otello* in huge cubicles, impressive in themselves but sometimes rendering the characters' movements within them ludicrous. Two examples will suffice. Shortly after the opening, when Iago explains to Roderigo why he hates the Moor, he refers to Cassio and the latter's promotion to the captaincy Iago coveted. In the

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score he points out Cassio, who is standing with a group of soldiers around a campfire built after the storm subsided. But for lack of a credible location in the first-act set, Terry Hands, director of the Paris *Otello,* had dispensed with campfire and soldiers too, and to make sense of Iago's lines had to have Cassio flit across the back of the stage for no reason other than directorial convenience. And in Act III, after the confrontation in which Otello demands the handkerchief that Desdemona cannot give him, there is no door nearby, and Otello flings her down a long passageway, requiring that she sprint like a hare to be offstage before he begins his monologue "*Dio! mi potevi scagliar.*"

The musical excellence of the performance redeemed these peculiarities. Here Solti seemed more in his element: though some orchestral balances were a bit crude, the tempos were well chosen, flexible, and manageable for the singers, and the big structures of the music had a natural sense of movement and climax. Solti's reputation is that of an efficient executant who creates musical light but not heat, and to some extent, as I have said, his *Figaro* confirmed such expectations. Not so *Otello:* he made something touching and important of many of the quiet orchestral passages while displaying his wonted expertise with the heavily concerted passages. And in the latter, where required, the beautiful voice of Margaret Price soared easily and powerfully, with superb breath control and succulent tone, through the big lines that lead the ensembles to their emotional conclusions. The low notes were likewise powerful and ample—most Desdemonas are scanty here—and the words were clearly articulated. The last-act Willow Song and prayer were simply and poignantly voiced, with no straining for effect, yet with an easily managed dynamic range that made them object lessons in Verdian musical utterance. Vocally, this was the Desdemona of a lifetime; and if the characterization seemed a bit stolid and unruffled for what Otello's wife suffers and fears, I confess I hardly thought of this until I was out of the theater. Gabriel Bacquier provided the reverse as Iago: though he often faked the vocal line at top and bottom, and chattered rather than sang some of the swiftly moving music, his portrayal was so full of theatrical life that it was impossible to quibble. As Otello, Carlo Cossutta sang nobly and convincingly, coloring the voice as the dramatic occasion demanded; this Moor lacked the almost superhuman stature Jon Vickers confers upon the character, but his anguish was palpable and moving, particularly in the lines of the wrathful "*Dio! mi potevi scagliar.*"

So the Paris Opera demonstrated that, given talent of the highest caliber, a *Figaro* can be well served—if not totally unified—by a Belgian Figaro, an American Cherubino, an Italian stage director, and the like; and an *Otello* can be similarly well served by a Welsh Desdemona, a French Iago, and a Hungarian conductor. The ideal embraced by the phrase "totally unified," however, is not one that will be easily expunged from the opera lover's fantasies—even for works like these, which have transcended national and historical boundaries and become universal cultural possessions.

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Reviews

J. E. CHAMBERLIN

Poetry Chronicle

THERE IS A KIND OF ELEGANT ambivalence about mankind's useless endeavors, and those who engage in them often display a nice blend of promethean paranoia and feline self-satisfaction. John Hollander has woven a complex and entertaining tale[1] out of the resemblances between the craft of the poet—who we have always known makes nothing happen—and the art of the spy—who is, as Hugh Trevor-Roper, among others, has recently assured us, the most perfectly useless of men. It is a nice fiction, and what is especially delightful is the rich display of mirror images which Hollander's reflections on espionage reveal.

First of all, there is the wonder of the exercise, of writing things that ostentatiously *are* something before they *mean* anything, of discovering how

> That code itself, the purest form of language
> Thrills the enciphering mind; putting the plain
> Sense into travelling garb is a kind of
> Singing. And until They change the codebook, my
> Eleven seems a kind of measure fit for
> Reaches of feeling as wide as any mode's.

There is much of the diffident assurance of Robert Browning here, and especially of his poet-prophet-prince Sordello, blended with an affable Augustan confidence in continuities, in cultural breeding. Providing energy to the enterprise is a zealous attachment to its purity, to its ultimate exemption from normal categories of experience, an attachment that brings to mind the aesthetic obsessions of the turn of this century. Certainly Hollander's master-spy, whose code-name was Cupcake, has the flickering aesthetic delicacy of the Imagist, as he sends many of his most appealing messages (through Control, of course) to the agent Image, about whom nothing is known.

The one insight which eliminates the bother of any tedious justification is that both the poet and the spy operate in closed systems, in which life and art (or craft) do not exactly merge, but reinforce and reflect each other, and in which the cover of the spy (the persona or mask of the artist) reveals the true self, as the "false self reflects back a real image" when "cover and work . . . embrace without touching." Indeed, some spies, as some poets,

[1] REFLECTIONS ON ESPIONAGE, by *John Hollander*. Atheneum. $8.95.

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may have come to find a kind
Of homeliness therein, as in the cover
(They) take in (their) code-names.

Ultimately, the hope is for one of

those flashes
Of understanding that would allow all the
Scraps and pieces and anxieties of the
Planning to catch fire all at one. Perhaps some
Controller, some extraordinary agent—
Soaring in the high region of his fancies,
With his garland and singing robes about him—
Might do it. Crowned only with a muss of hair,
Barely wrapped in the muffled tatters of my
Mute bathrobe I stare out at the gray early
Morning traffic groaning down its avenue.

The paranoia of the compulsive outcast, of Prufrock and Mauberley as well as Melmoth and Pierrot, is a part of this portrait, with the city replacing the wilderness in an unmistakable manner. The world in which Hollander's fiction is set is essentially a reflection of the consciousness and attitude of a fairly defined time and place, when the "altogether inconvenient little republic which ceased to exist a good time ago" flourished after its fashion, and when

European theories
Revealing the brotherhood of prophecy
And encipherment

were particularly fashionable. This brotherhood has since become severely divided—hermeneutics and structuralism and so forth—but the spirit prevails, and the compelling fascination with encipherment is linked with imaginative speculation. The work in which the agent Cupcake is engaged is a continual struggle against being found out, against unwary routine, against false confidence.

We must keep asking for
Ciphers more difficult, each month, to use, lest
Our care and hope vanish into the message,
Coding having become too much a matter
Of sighing, flopping into one's chair . . .

Ciphers change with the moon, as it were, and one of Cupcake's lunatic obsessions is with night surveillance—Il Penseroso contemplating the orderings of

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all these soft,
Negative stars (which) shift their encipherings from
Moment to moment: one must shun the madness
Of deeming them constant and significant.

One way, the true and paradoxical way, of shunning this madness is by embracing the significance of the obscurely constant and the constantly obscure, by subverting trivial expectations and expecting the trivial to be subversive, by playing casual games with purposeful intensity.

We are left with a final menace, the irony of perpetual solipsism, of losing oneself in the hall of mirrors that Shelley described in *Alastor*. Cupcake was

warned in
Training . . . about absorption
In the observed image which might as well be
In a mirror.

And he is acutely aware that

As with the life, so ridiculously, with
The work. But, after all, which of them is the
Enciphered version of the other one, and
Are we, after all, even supposed to know?

Questions of cause and effect, distinctions between real and imaginative, problems of time and space . . . these inform all processes of transformation, all creative functions. Cupcake's confusion is no different from Wallace Stevens'; somewhat exasperated by efforts to decipher a first cause for emotional and artistic activity, Stevens told a correspondent that he "felt very much like the boy whose mother told him to stop sneezing; he replied: 'I am not sneezing, it's sneezing me.' " Cupcake sneezes his way, or is sneezed, through interminable encipherments until he reaches a point at which invention and discovery merge, and the self merges with its creations in a message to the Aeolian Lyrebird.

Beth Bentley[2] is also intrigued by correspondences and reflections, exemplified by Andrew Marvell's image of "the Mind, that Ocean where each kind / Does streight its own resemblance find," and conditioned by a world in which

we resume
our imaginary lives, smiling
at our visions, given shape

and substance by a mirror
("The Mirror")

[2] COUNTRY OF RESEMBLANCES, by *Beth Bentley*. Ohio University Press. $6.75.

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The motifs of Bentley's volume are provided by the apparently indispensable Martin Buber, by the ubiquitous Chuang Tzu, and by that perpetual sneezer Wallace Stevens. The quotation from Chuang Tzu with which the second section of the group begins sets the tone.

> Now he does not know: is he a man who dreamed
> he was a butterfly or a butterfly who dreams
> that he is a man?

There are some nice explanations of this notion in the volume, such as "The Poet at Seven," in which an expression of anger precipitates a confused realization of its origins, its possible independence of the self yet its certain reflection of the self.

> Anger. Anger like her mother's. But
> she felt no anger, seeing her friend's
> red face, only wonder at what she'd done.
>
> And wonder as she learned her mind
> was a hidden place, deep as grass,
> thick as the scent of peach-blossom,
>
> quieter than sky seen through branches;
> a quiet into which she moved, swimming
> down, down, down through dark waters
>
> toward trees, beasts, changing weather:
> the place her self lived. It waited for her,
> the country of resemblances.

Carl Jung, a distinguished geographer of this country, once remarked in an introduction to the Taoist *Secret of the Golden Flower* (translated by Richard Wilhelm in 1929) that the process of intuitive ordering of experience is "first projected and expressed in forms furnished by the experience of organic life, that is, as fruit, embryo . . . This fact could best be expressed in the words 'It is not I who live, it lives me.' "

Bentley's interest in what Stevens (in an epigraph she employs) called "a muddy centre before we breathed . . . a myth before the myth began" leads her to one of the most powerful and elemental of Greek myths, that of Demeter and Persephone. Her treatment is rather schematic, to be sure, but the instincts are fair.

> Above all, the mother liked order . . .
> In the garden, her rows lay straight,
> tomatoes facing south, corn
> in clusters so as to pollinate.
> The bees and winds did as they were told;

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days followed in proper sequence; months
were schooled. There was no rebellion.
Even the vegetables consented,
seasonably, to being eaten.

But the daughter liked her chair
to face the window one day, and
the next to face into the room.
She liked doors swinging open,
especially on windy days, and sometimes
at night. Moonwort, tall and purple,
turned up among the daughter's onion sets,
and rows meandered one into the other.
When she should be weeding, she was dreaming
in the shade, or standing in the river
shallows. She was fond of exploring
the woods, where people had disappeared—
the daughter liked mysteries.

("Mother and Daughter")

Walter Pater suggested that "no chapter in the history of the human imagination is more curious than the myth of Demeter, and Kore or Persephone." James Frazer saw it as "one of the few myths in which the sunshine and clarity of the Greek genius are crossed by the shadow and mystery of death." Persephone's story is, in a sense, an intense version of the story of Adonis, of Hyacinth, of Adrastus, of the Sleeping Beauty. She is the goddess of summer, and the goddess of death; and Demeter's grief is poignant and selfish. The confusion with the myths of Dionysus, Cybele, Attis and Pan (who in the guise of Marsyas pipes to Cybele to console her for the death of Attis) are many and profound, and provide the story of Demeter and Persephone with rich and disturbing associations and possibilities. William Carlos Williams touched on one aspect in *Kora in Hell;* most recently, W. S. Merwin has given a complex version in a poem entitled "Kore." Beth Bentley, though she has chosen only one theme here, might write a powerful and compelling sequence out of her perception of the myth and her sense of its implications, for her genius appears also to be crossed by shadow and the mystery of death. Her present volume, as a whole, is without the cohesion and focus—and therefore without the power—that mirrors and resemblances could give to a different kind of poet. There are fine possibilities, but curiously repressed.

Derek Walcott's new volume[3] is a rich collection of poems, which displays the author's humor and sensitivity in a wide range of pleasurable inventions and striking images.

[3] SEA GRAPES, by *Derek Walcott*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $8.95.

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The ancient war
between obsession and responsibility
will never finish and has been the same

for the sea-wanderer or the one on shore
now wriggling on his sandals to walk home,
since Troy sighed its last flame,

and the blind giant's boulder heaved the trough
from whose ground-swell the great hexameters come
to the conclusions of exhausted surf.

The classics can console. But not enough.
("Sea Grapes")

Walcott does not offer consolation, but the kind of resolution that Stevens talked about in "The Man on the Dump," where "one sits and beats an old tin can, lard pail,"

and in the end, one always
comes to this:
to the dock,
the rain hazed horizon
and the corpses of poems.
("Frederiksted Nights")

There are several notable elements in these poems. Some consist of a celebration of endurance, whether of people or places:

old men like empties
set down from morning outside the almshouse,
to let the rising evening brim their eyes,
. . . . . .
. . . . . .Whatever it is
that leaves bright flesh like sand and turns it chill,
not age alone, they were old, but a state
made possible by their collective will,
would shine in them like something between life
and death, our two concrete simplicities,
and waited too in, seeming not to wait,
substantial light and insubstantial stone.
("Frederiksted, Dusk")

Other poems sparkle with refreshing scepticism and a lively wit, not without its chill.

Then after Eden,

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was there one surprise?
O yes, the awe of Adam
at the first bead of sweat . . .

Adam had an idea.
He and the snake would share
the loss of Eden for a profit.
So both made the New World. And it looked good.
("New World")

There are also unsettling interludes, such as those in which Walcott illuminates, with sly skill, some relationships between fictions and lies, and sheds some disturbing light on the complex obligations of the poet:

but in the black markets
lizard-smart poets

selling copper tributes
changing skin with the tribe

and the tribe still buys it
the dreams and the lies
("Dread Song")

At what point must we mistrust our fictions, our language, our images? One grows to hate these things except on the dump. Or in "Sainte Lucie":

O Martinas, Lucillas,
I'm a wild golden apple
that will burst with love
of you and your men,
those I never told enough
with my young poet's eyes
crazy with the country,
generations going,
generations gone,
moi c'est gens Ste. Lucie.
C'est la moi sorti;
is there that I born.

Walcott is a fine poet, knowing finally that he

may even understand the contract
between the galloping lion and the stunned doe;
there is some yes to terror in her eyes.

What I will never understand

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is the beast who writes this
and claims the centre of life.
("Force")

David St. John's first volume of poems[4] is filled with fine touches, clever images, elegiac tones, but flawed by poor connections, unenticing discontinuities, and unnecessarily coy moments: ("I vowed to take up my affair with your mandolinist. I took off my silence, and my coat; and I waited for you.") The opening poem (taking as its inspiration a poem by the Polish writer Tadeusz Rózewicz) introduces a poet whose invitation is to a somewhat macabre and unevenly metaphysical realm of fictions.

This is the light, I said.
This is the light, and the day . . .

Here; I pointed. A newsman
whose tongue is a rancid almond. A machinist
whose ears drone like sirens. Your own twin,
looking for a street sign. A girl, slipping
her hands under your shirt.

No, he said. Go on.

These are my hands,
that drag a knife through meat,
that stack crates in warehouses, in trucks,
that whisper like thieves in dark offices,
that twist an icepick into your temple,
that hold a woman's face.

Yes. What else.

Nothing else. Or this:
that some days, the letter you wait for comes;
that the light is blowing into the hallway—
as you open the door, and step out.

You're lying, he said. Go on.
("This")

Whitman rampant, with gules. Rózewicz once noted that an image or metaphor "does not speed up but rather delays the reader's encounter with the true meaning of a poetic work," and St. John is adept at sustained encounters . . . though he is not yet quite so good at conveying true meanings. I might add that his literary touchstones are also in this

[4] HUSH, by *David St. John*. Houghton Mifflin. $6.95; $3.95 paperback.

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mold, but more successful at "only (un)connecting." St. John's most poignant poems are his most private ones, such as "Naming the Unborn"; his most interesting approach the surrealistic, such as the scheme of "Four O'Clock in Summer: Hope," after a painting of that title by Tanguy in the Raymond Queneau collection in Paris. When he controls his affectations ("loneliness means having / Your gin neat . . . and risk is just a vehicle of faith") and commits himself to some one kind of poetic relationship to his subject, at least for enough time to master it, St. John may well be a fine and consistent poet.

Raymond Queneau would I suspect like to be ushered in the back door in this way, and suitably there is in a series of poetry translations from the French that have recently been published an excellent selection of Queneau, well translated by Teo Savory.[5] Queneau's poems must be fiendish to translate—with their profusion of fabricated words, rhymes, phonetic devices; and dislocations of words, lines, meanings—but Savory does a fine job. And who would want to miss Queneau, explaining (with Byronic ennui) that

> When poets are bored then they o-
> Ften decide to pick up a pen and write a po-
> Em You understand that these conditions so-
> Metimes tickle up a little poetry po-
> Etry

or moving us closer "Toward a Poetic Art" with modest expectations:

> A poem's just a little thing
> Hardly more than a cyclone in the Antilles
> a typhoon in the China Seas
> an earthquake in Nanking
>
> A flood in the Yang-tse-Kiang
> at one fell swoop drowns you a thousand Chinese
> bang
> that's not even the subject for a poem
> Nothing much
>
> We keep busy in our village
> going to build a better school
> going to vote for a new mayor
> and change our market days
>
> we used to be the hub of the universe but now
> we find we're near the ocean current that
> the horizon gnaws at

[5] SELECTED POEMS, by *Raymond Queneau*. Translated by Teo Savory. Unicorn Press. $10.00; $4.00 paperback.

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A poem's just a little thing

The Queneau volume is published by the Unicorn Press, which has also published translations of a variety of works in French and German, as well as the work of well and little known writers in English. It is a venture that is well worth noticing, for there are some pleasant reminders and delightful surprises, and the volumes themselves are presented with taste and individuality—neither always entirely to my liking, but with an admirable sense of purpose and evidence of consideration. One of the most intriguing of the present group is a translation of Guillevic's *Euclideans*,[6] a wittily anthropomorphic presentation of geometric design and poetic reification. The hyperbola, for example:

To be not only this hollow,
but also these two long graphs

which never finish up
by being
lines that are really lines,

to know that this can
happen only in infinity,

which must be a myth,
a lost region.

—Must one be asymptote
even in infinity?

At the other extreme, the equilateral triangle:

I've gone too far
with my obsession for order.

There's no future in it.

There is one volume in the packet that came from the Unicorn Press that I should especially like to mention; a first volume by Michael Hogan, entitled *Letters for My Son*.[7] Several of these are poems written about or from prison, and they all display a keen poetic insight, an attention to the details of the imaginative life which is remarkably sure in spirit; and though at times Hogan is unsure in execution, his shortcomings have a poetic side to them.

[6] EUCLIDEANS, by *Guillevic*. Translated by Teo Savory. Unicorn Press. $10.00; $4.00 paperback.

[7] LETTERS FOR MY SON, by *Michael Hogan*. Unicorn Press. $10.00; $3.00 paperback.

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My little boy, no longer small,
writes to me as a stranger writes.
Had all those kitchen miles of crawling
led West, he would be here.
Had I lingered there handcuffed by love,
regret perhaps would not lie thick
as the soap ring in her sink.

Today he writes and wonders
why it was I left and there
is no emotion, no sense
of loss, merely curiosity—
a question a bright child might ask
like: why did biplanes have two wings
and no easy, circular reasoning, please.
The answer, not terribly important to him,
should still be true.

("Letter from My Son")

Celebrating the arrival of spring, Hogan creates a particularly effective and lasting image:

Above them a tower guard dips his rifle
then raises it again dreamily.
He imagines a speckled trout
coming up shining and raging with life.

("Spring")

Miriam Waddington[8] is capable of sensitive writing and of fine effects, and her poetry is often marked by a delicately vicious self-consciousness.

I stand alone
in the great anteroom
no use now
even to be afraid
there is no one to
be afraid to anymore.

("Ending")

This poem is one of a powerful sequence of "darkening snapshots of (the poet's) dead husband":

my mother said,
with a marriage
like that it's
plain curtains

[8] THE PRICE OF GOLD, by *Miriam Waddington*. Oxford University Press. $3.95.

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for simple
you—

Well it was
curtains
in a way for a
while for me;
but for him
it was curtains
too and for him
forever and for
always.
("Wives' Tales")

There are some dangers in this kind of poetry, to be sure, and the temptation to be cleverly obvious is one that Waddington enjoys risking. What diminishes the effect of this game, and of its serious implications, is an irritating tendency to try to be overtly serious, to be universally significant, to discover ultimate truths . . . as for example discovering

in such unlikely places
as rocky earthbound faces,
the eternal lineaments
of the transforming lover.
("Artists and old chairs")

It is possible to make this discovery, of course, but not easily in this poem about chairs. And it is difficult to work up much enthusiasm for this kind of spiritual gymnastics on a caesura's notice.

Our ghosts sit there and stare ahead,
this year the people are not kind;
their eyes are fixed
on the lake of the dark trees
they do not see each other.

They sit on the stone bench
they do not see each other,
each one is looking inward and
each one is continually taking
the photograph of his own ghost
("The dark lake")

Waddington writes out of a belief (in Gertrude Stein's word that provide her with an epigraph to a section on "Living Canadian") that

every one is as their land is, as the climate is,

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as the mountains and the rivers or their oceans
are . . .

This is about as true as a poetic statement ever is; and although Canadian poetry undoubtedly reflects the consciousness that its environment creates, I see little future in the interminable behaviorist orgies of provincial self-discovery that this environment and some of its besieged inhabitants seem inevitably to encourage. Stein also spoke of there being "more space where nobody is than where everybody is" in the New World. Miriam Waddington is at her best writing of those spaces where nobody is, except sometimes somebody's shadow.

Revealing the hand
with its signs
and its wonders
writing bird
beak and claw
writing
ice mounds and ages
whose writing
has summoned
from the caves of
green light from
the flowing of
water
the shadowy figures
of those who come after
and their shadowy
laughter
("The cave")

Grace Schulman[9] has a sure instinct for images that inform the romantic sensibility, for the importance of

returning
to the village where forests
are spirals of fire, to climb
narrow roads and find that pine
torn by lightning, its branches holding
stares of needles that strain the sky,
pointing upward, stiff
as hands in prayer.

To return in silence; I have touched
the nightingale I cannot see,

[9] BURN DOWN THE ICONS, by *Grace Schulman*. Princeton University Press. $7.50; $3.95 paperback.

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crossing the river
that drives through rocks
and sings in my blood,
treasure of my being

("Recovery")

What she does not yet have is a sure sense of what I would call voice and mood, of the relationship of the subject to the action, and the function of the poetic statement with respect to both. Even without meeting these conditions, however, she achieves lines curiously sharp in outline.

I have established my chapel in water.
I would move through mountains. But fathers,
Let me return to a safe harbour; like the waves'
Slate-sheets, crash in the jetties of your arms.

("Burn Down the Icons")

One especially intriguing element in Schulman's poetry is her use of the paradoxes of imaginative metamorphosis, of forms changing yet remaining the same, of energy that creates and destroys, of love that famishes the receiver as well as the giver, of transformations that are intensifications, of surfaces that are profound, of effects that are causes.

I pray to Proteus, the god of change
And proteolysis, 'the end of change
Changing in the end'
To break old images and make you new
As love is its own effect unendingly.

("Surely as Certainty Changes")

This is somewhat pedantic, perhaps; elsewhere the images take on more life:

our air is flung
With forms that change;
We burn on air as fire feeds and kills,
As water becomes ice or vapor,
As sun moves all things,
We manage mountains,
Altering horizons.

("Morning Song")

Or the forces are personified with a kind of classical humor.

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See me in the glaze
On a leaf, in the skin's
Iridescence, have me in luminous
Reveries; light turns into me.
I preside the sea: waves harness
My force. I am lightning
Flashing; I am the lair
Of all change that is life.
My road is various; an alternating blaze;
I generate and destroy,
Feed what I devour,
Burning on air.

("Metamorphosis")

The consistent use of the image of fire in this volume makes for a powerful kind of continuity; and Schulman's control, her surprising lack of self-pity, augur well. She plays with paradoxes as though they were metaphors, and with metaphors as though they were paradoxes, seeming to know that both are the same, and gorgeous nonsense, as she "immolate(s herself), betraying friends / ((her) enemies), decoding messages" . . . a nervous Cupcake trying to find Lyrebird's frequency.

Peter Redgrove[10] is an accomplished hunter of snarks.

It is lechery, lechery: fits and starts,
Grabbing and gluttony, while the sightless worm
Like soft successive links of a spring
Wants to pile out and slubber for hours
In the moist slow shade among the twigs
And damn the birds! in this slithing time.

("A Leaf from my Bestiary")

The poems in this selection of Redgrove's work are quirky and disturbing, and many of them are very fine indeed. Some are poems of loss, of waste—from a Frostian lament for a boy who lost his hand to a hungry saw, to a reflective "walk on the waste-ground for no good reason":

I crash a puddle up my shin,
Brush a nettle across my hand,
And swear—then sweat from what I said:
Indeed, the sun withdraws as if I stung.

Indeed, she withdrew as if I stung,
And I walked up and down among these canted beams,
bricks and scraps,
Bitten walls and weed-stuffed gaps

[10] SONS OF MY SKIN: Selected Poems 1954-1974, by *Peter Redgrove*. Chosen and introduced by Marie Peel. Routledge and Kegan Paul. $12.25.

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Looking as it would feel now, if I walked back,
Across the carpets of my home, my own home.
("For No Good Reason")

His invitation is to share in a sense of the force and the fury, the beauty and the fear, of the world that "attends (us) / Like a friendship." He introduces us to "Dr. Faust's Sea-Spiral Spirit":

It changes places
With Job continually . . .
It is the last trumpet
And the first trumpet.
It fashioned Glastonbury Tor
With helical fingermarks.

And his descriptions of the nature of organic forms and unseen but clearly perceived growth are nicely worked. Always he has a good eye, and a human compassion.

Grown-up idiot, see the slow-motion of him,
And that slow-motion sludge of a tongue
Coiling along its stream of happenings . . .
Thereafter he was to wander
With a hesitation at either elbow
And a little free-wheeling spittle
Through a kind of pastoral . . .
("Decreator")

Redgrove is deceptive; his sometimes trite phrasing is often reiterated with compelling skill to create fine moments.

Hours late we walk among the strewn dead
Of this tide's sacrifice. There are strangled mussels:
The moon pulls back the lid, the wind unhinges them,
They choke on fans, they are bunched blue, black band.
The dead are beautiful, and give us life.
The setting wave recoils
In flocculence of blood-in-crystal,
It is medusa parched to hoofprints, broken bands,
Which are beautiful, and give us life.
The moon has stranded and the moon's air strangled
And the beauty of her dead dunes sent us up there
Which gave us life.
("The Moon Disposes")

His creative mind is restless, nervous, anxious, always fidgeting—his friend "had hair that was / tangled and scurfy, you / could work a radio

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on so much detail." A drop of rain becomes "a terrestrial globe for nobody's inspection"; the "troubled horsetrough" in the same scene holds "a slightly vaster version of the sky." His surprises are splendid:

> Only
> underground, far beneath
> the exhausted soil the
> great rock still
> wings silently.
> ("From Love's Journeys")

He has a fascination with what Pater referred to as "diaphaneité," with crystalline translucence and transparence, as a metaphorical condition of creative energy; and he would share with Victor Hugo and Aubrey Beardsley alike a belief in the grotesque as central to art. Redgrove is a disturbingly original and a genially frightening poet, and this book is full of some of his best work. My only cavil is with the undoubtedly well-intentioned but quite unnecessary introduction by Marie Peel. I do not much want to be told that Redgrove "recoiled also from the castration of knowledge with every sliver labelled for analysis rather than the living continuum he knew." I would rather read Redgrove, writing on "The Nature of Cold Weather":

> His teeth unclench and jaw tumbles
> Cheeks sink flat in jagged thaws
> Like the cracking of fledglings or of hands,
> And black branching cracks grow green and pimpled,
> And grass, not pleasure, skrimp-pins him to the ground.
> His withered limbs lie as short-ice in the grass,
> In ice-weals along the shaded bumps
> Drawn after his teeth and jaws, legs and lion-like head,
> Brain, spirit and crystalline reflection
> Along the chugging streams
> That feed on him and grow plush along their sides.
> The sun shines on the green meadows,
> The chines and valleys, tufts and hillocks
> Quilted with daisies and with buttercups,
> Misty with gossamer and pollen,
> And his heels drum in the stream
> As the playing children come.

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SONYA RUDIKOFF

To Grandmother's House We Go

OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS—but isn't it more likely to be over the Long Island Expressway, or over the George Washington Bridge and through the Tunnel, or through the housing project? And is Grandmother's house at the edge of the wood, or is it an apartment in a tall building? Is she even there? Perhaps she is off to an encounter group or a trip around the world or a Golden Age Club? And, as for the horse knowing the way to carry the sleigh—the *horse*? the *sleigh*?!

In the world of childhood songs and fairy tales, not only do horses know the way but they speak and warn, and birds whisper clues, ants you didn't stamp on will help you find thousands of pearls if necessary, mice and frogs and dwarfs and ugly old women will come to your aid. That is, if you are the simple son or the third daughter, with the cruel stepmother and the wicked sisters and lazy brothers. Evil queens abound, and stupid kings and brave hunters; also princes and princesses, and castles, ogres, witches, giants, the drops of blood, the magic potions, the mysterious objects, the fateful wishes, the strawberries under the snow. The fairy tale world with its logic and causality is close to the world of dreams, the unconscious and mysterious domain we all share, and close to the world of conscious and deliberate artifice. Fairy tales have often been regarded as remnants of the race's childhood, not entirely serious or respectable, not noble and instructive but pleasureful, easy, indulgent, useful for quieting troublesome children. With works of art, they have survived the enduring distrust civilization sometimes expresses about fantasy, and their power and fascination continues to enchant.

Bruno Bettelheim, the psychoanalyst well-known for his work with disturbed children, is enormously interested in fairy tales and their immemorial enchantment, and he has written a most absorbing book about them.[1] His interest, as the title indicates, is not so much in the history or aesthetics of the tales as in the uses of their enchantment, the way fairy tales propose certain psychological conflicts and problems, and then metaphorically offer solutions—not rules of conduct, as in cautionary tales, but imaginative projections of feelings, problems, developmental situations. These fantasy alternatives or solutions are phrased in terms of unreal personages and impossible occurrences: a frog talks and asks to be taken into a girl's bed, a coach turns into a pumpkin, a sausage sticks to the nose, a girl's hair is so long that it can be used as a rope. Dr. Bettelheim's interest is of course in the psychological content of fairy tale fantasy and its resemblance to dream imagery and dream causality, but in a sophisticated age this is to be expected; indeed, the widespread familiar-

[1] THE USES OF ENCHANTMENT, The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales, by *Bruno Bettelheim*. Knopf. $12.50.

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ity with psychological and psychoanalytic deciphering enables anyone at all to appreciate the symbolism of fairy tales. Dr. Bettelheim's greater interest, however, is in the anagogic function of the tales, their provision of subtle guidance and their promises of reward and punishment. Thus, the stories of brothers and sisters are not merely symbolic of sibling rivalry, but are instructive in the means for coping with that rivalry. The Three Little Pigs is to be seen as instruction in three stages of childhood mastery over the pleasure principle, Hansel and Gretel as guidance in overcoming oral anxiety, Cinderella, Snow White, and The Frog King are about sexuality and maturity. The traditional fairy tale must end happily, thus providing the youthful listener with optimism and confidence in solving his own problems, but before the happy ending, the hero or heroine undergoes trials and tests, is at the mercy of those who don't appreciate him or her, who threaten or mistreat, who set impossible tasks and are often cruel. The story of Little Red Riding Hood and of the Sleeping Beauty are about girls but they need not be restricted, for boys too must learn about the management of sexual temptation and development, and about the mystery of sexual awakening which follows the necessary and valuable withdrawal into the self that precedes maturity. The simpleton sons and cruelly-treated daughters who must perform acts of skill and elude dangers, outwit brothers, sisters, and cruel stepmother before they meet the prince or princess and inherit the kingdom, these heroes and heroines speak to the youthful listener indirectly of hidden hopes and future success, teaching the story of growing up and coming into the inheritance of one's own life.

Psychoanalytic thinking deepens and enriches the already weighty meaning of the old tales, and Dr. Bettelheim's discussion of their disguised instruction is extremely interesting. Of course, the tales must not explicitly instruct if they are to enchant, although a good fairy tale should include certain elements in addition to the happy ending. In fact, those modern fairy tales which end in sadness or failure are not really satisfactory, even if they include the other elements, because punishment of wickedness is integral to the happy ending. Following Tolkien, Dr. Bettelheim calls attention to the importance also of consolation, which the happy ending provides, after the escape from danger, and the recovery from disaster. A profound threat to life is also an essential element, as a kind of reliving and mastering of old separation anxiety. The splitting of characters into the good mother who is dead or away or somehow not there, and the evil stepmother, the good queen and the bad queen, or the stupid king and the helpful animal, the brave hunter and the absent king, all are valuable symbolic devices which enable the listener to maintain love for his own parents while at the same time dealing with the primitive rage against those very parents on whom he depends. The primitive feelings of infancy, their transformations through childhood, and their later disguises are all to be found in the details of fairy tales and in the magical objects and acts which recur in significant moments.

The violence and severe punishment such tales often exhibit and the

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cruelty of stepmothers and evil fairies used to be thought too frightening for young children and the events too unrealistic. Dr. Bettelheim severely questions this position, pointing out that the very violence and harshness have an important expressive and cathartic function for children, especially when the targets of violence are so often symbolic personages. Furthermore, the fantasy violence is obviously not the same emotion as actual feelings of rage, nor is the symbolic act to be taken as equivalent to the real. He might also have noted the curious contradiction in this modern "realistic" critique, which at the same time denounces fairy tales for *excessive* reality and for the *lack* of reality.

The importance and value of fairy tale enchantment cannot be discussed in isolation, however, and it is a serious flaw in Dr. Bettleheim's argument for the tales that he ignores the whole ambience of children's literature which has developed around them. His comparison of *The Little Engine That Could* with the older tales is not sufficient. Whether we like it or not, children nowadays are surrounded by a whole new world of unprecedented imaginative productions created precisely for them. Whole departments of libraries are set aside entirely for their own use and pleasure, in which are to be found children's books on every known subject, beautifully printed and illustrated, and written by extremely competent people. Graded reading lists provided by the schools assist the specially trained children's librarian (who hardly needs such assistance!) and books of all sorts may be found for slow readers, fast readers, boys, girls, readers of 5, 6, or 7 years of age, 8 to 12, 7 to 11, 10 to 12, 11 to 14, and so on. Children who become regular patrons of libraries know how to reserve books, look up others in the card catalog, explore the large reference books. They can find "fiction" and "non-fiction" on any subject from atomic physics to Zeus. Children are urged to read, encouraged by teachers, parents, bookstores, librarians, helped by new theories about reading, and aided by reading specialists and therapists should reading difficulties be discovered. Children's librarians are specially trained at story-telling too, know the myths and folk and fairy tales by heart, and may have advanced degrees in children's literature from library schools or graduate departments of English studies. And children's fiction covers everything from sibling rivalry, parental divorce, death, drugs, sexual adventures or disasters, religious problems, fantastic occurrences, failures in sports or social life, successes in sports or social life, historical children. Even fairy tales join in the efflorescence and are reprinted in new editions, retold with new illustrations or for another age group.

Dr. Bettelheim may cast himself as the defender and rescuer of fairy tales but he does so without regard for the existing situation. To be sure, the sanction given to fairy tales by modern librarians and parents and educators may be superficial and perhaps neglects the more profound uses which the psychoanalyst finds for them, but his warm enthusiasm for them can certainly be matched by that of children's literature specialists. Those reality-intoxicated teachers and parents whom he chides for their narrow literal-minded criticism can almost effortlessly be shown to be

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narrow and literal-minded, but other more complicated opposition is not acknowledged. Actually, the history of *dissatisfaction* with fairy tales would be as voluminous as the history of enthusaism for them. Ages other than our own have exhibited indifference to their charms, even disdain and condescension. Perrault rewrote many of them and, although he earns Dr. Bettelheim's scorn for having done it, there must surely have been a demand for the revised version which did not exist for the original. And even before Perrault, the old tales were being supplanted or transcended by more systematic guides for the development of young persons, not merely revisions of ancient tales but all the courtesy books and manuals for the moral and social instruction of the young. Then, as literacy spread, and the middle class developed, the oral tradition declined, not through wilful neglect but because of a proliferation of new sources of knowledge and enchantment. There was formal schooling too, and the systematizing of knowledge, and the revolutionary ideology which proclaimed that human beings were not to be restricted to the class or folk wisdom of their origins. By the time the Brothers Grimm began to collect fairy tales, they had begun to disappear, and the Grimms consciously collected the old tales as art forms similar to Morris dances and old tapestries. Goethe's mother was a great teller of fairy tales apparently, as was Dr. Bettelheim's mother, like uncounted and unknown legions of mothers, nurses, fathers, and other guardians of the historical unconscious who kept it alive through centuries of loving transmission. But were there no reasons why this repository of age-old wisdom began to be disdained several centuries ago? Was it only stupidity and literal-mindedness? Or the self-serving self-deception of parents? For here, as elsewhere in his writing, especially in his works on autistic children, Dr. Bettelheim speaks in the accents of the rescuer of children imprisoned in their parents' misconceptions, and he rather baldly accuses parents of preventing their children from enjoying fairy tales because the parents don't like the way parents are depicted in them!

As we ponder these fairy tales and consider their usefulness for children struggling with the perennial oedipal and sibling conflicts of childhood, the entire defense of the genre reveals problems. There is no question about the psychological uses of their enchantment, and in fact the very notion of *usefulness* as applied to psychological content is itself useful. What seems troubling, though, are some of the implied assumptions about the social and historical setting for that use. The tales, for instance, are supposedly best told by a mother, not read, and by a parent not still entangled in oedipal conflicts. This of course presupposes the quintessential stable, chronologically-organized middle- or upper-middle class family, something which cannot be so easily assumed to exist nowadays. The story-telling mother has time and energy and is not detained at shop or office or by other vocational or social demands (fill in servants off-stage). The hidden didacticism of the tales, which is their great value, addresses psychic conflicts of older children struggling with fantasy and reality, not toddlers, but what of their homework? Their music lessons, clubs, friends,

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paper routes, after-school jobs or sports, what of the library? The question is not whether fairy tales have the power, meaning, and usefulness ascribed to them but, rather, how powerful can they be in personal development in a setting with so many other sources of knowledge, pleasure, and enchantment, so many other demands? Whether there should be so much else going on in childhood is another question, but fairy tales cannot now be seriously regarded as a major influence on the fantasy life of children.

The boy Goethe obviously had no television to watch while his mother, the story-teller, made supper. Whatever one's feeling about television, the modern child's intimate familiarity with it is so prominent a fact of modern life that no argument about children's fantasy life can be pursued without considering it. How many children must there be whose imagination is full of the personages of Sesame Street, or The Electric Company or Captain Kangaroo, and not Rapunzel, or the Little Tailor or the other metaphors of the fairy tale? And how many might have made Walter Cronkite and all the weather reporters, and the people and stories of news events, all these fragments, into complex personal fantasies? Serious scrutiny of television suggests that its summoning of the fantasy world, and its disposition of the energies evoked, is not at all benign in its effects on children, or on their parents either. Any consideration of enchantment among modern children must take account of the predominance of television in its power to evoke, shape, and control the fantasy it evokes, and the difference between these processes and the fantasy of narrative and fairy tale. Even Goethe's mother might not be able to exercise her skills so authoritatively when rivaled by Big Bird or Mr. Rogers or the Muppets and the rest.

Events of the past thirty years certainly make anyone pause before delineating "reality" and "fantasy" too confidently—that reality toward which fairy tales ideally provide a bridge, an arena for psychic rehearsal. Reality has become unbelievable in recent decades, to the point of banality, and the horrors of fantasy have been enacted before our very eyes. No longer is the world of children isolated from events as it was in the past, and the old gradual intimate initiation into reality which seems to have characterized earlier patterns of maturation is hardly to be found now. Is there time for the fairy tale lessons to be learned about the self and its passions, does the more formal objective explicit learning reinforce the earlier psychic structures, or is there nothing to reinforce, only an abrupt shift without meaning? Fairy tales teach compassion for ugly animals, trust in strange old men and women, helpfulness toward those asking for help. Little Red Riding Hood's story addresses matters of sexual development; although she strays from the path and invites danger, she is rescued. But we know, and children know, that contemporary dangers come with impartial frequency to those who keep on the path or stray, that it makes no difference, that acts may not have consequences, that old inevitable connections may be broken. If, as it seems, there is something wrong with the entire contemporary pace for dealing with the transition from fantasy to reality, what kind of learning must intervene and link the

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fairy tale to experience, which may not wait for the initial lessons to be learned and may not reinforce and renew them with developing maturity? How to know whether the ugly stranger is a disguised helper, or a pimp, a pusher, a hustler? What if the simpleton youngest son is mugged on the school playground, if the trusting youngest daughter is taken into the girls' washroom and her head put in the toilet or worse?

Fairy tale illustrations usually show people in medieval dress, in castles, cottages, and forests, with brave hunters, and grandmothers at the edge of the wood, all in a familiar vaguely German landscape. Even if the pictures are offensive to one's own inward imaginative grasp of the tale, most readers would still situate the tales in such a landscape. Is it Chester, or Broadway? Or Bamberg, Rothenburg, or Dinkelsbühl: the thatched roofs, and half-timbered houses, woods, brooks, the kerchiefed women? What about the generations brought up on fairy tales? If so much is claimed for them, then, to put it crudely and perhaps stupidly, why has life not been better? Especially in the culture of the Brothers Grimm, entire generations failed to learn the lessons offered by fairy tales. What other forces intervened? It was in fact that very land of the Märchen which produced concentration camps, the reality of hideous fantasy. As for the tortures they devised later on in those camps, the horrors they perpetrated—how did the dragons and wicked witches and cruel stepmothers and ogres of deepest terror spring out of fantasy to overwhelm reality?

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MARVIN MUDRICK

The Ugly Duck

As a boy Hans Christian Andersen was hopelessly mad about the theater, he yearned and struggled to be an actor, a singer, a dancer, nothing made him happier than to find himself on a stage in front of an audience. A half-century later, in the relaxed and amusing story "Auntie," he paid his tribute to those on the other side of the footlights who were as "theater-crazy" as he himself had been:

> "I go to school in the theater," Auntie would declare. "It is the well from which I draw my learning, it has even helped me to recollect what I learned in Sunday school. *Moses* and *Joseph and His Brothers* are both operas, and I have heard them. All that I know about history, geography, and human nature I have learned in the theater. From the French plays I know what life is like in Paris—it is obscene but interesting. Oh, how I cried when I saw *The Family Rigquebourg*. It is all about a poor man who has to drink himself to death so that his wife can marry her young lover. . . ."[1]

Just once, in a sort of apotheosis, Auntie the model spectator becomes Auntie the immodest spectacle:

> It had been a winter day, one of those days when daylight consists of two hours of gray twilight. It was cold and had been snowing, but they were performing *Herman von Unna,* a one-act opera, plus a grand ballet, with both a prologue and an epilogue. It would last until the small hours of the morning. Auntie just had to go! From the lodger who had rented her spare room she borrowed a pair of sled boots with sheepskin lining, though they were too big for her and reached all the way up to her knees.
>
> But she managed to make her way to the Royal Theater and to her box: second circle on the left. It is the better side; and here, too, the royal family have their box. The scenery is arranged so that it looks more beautiful seen from there.
>
> All at once someone screamed: "Fire!" And smoke poured out of the loft. Panic broke out! Auntie had kept the sled boots on during the performance because they were so nice and warm. And that they were, but they were not meant for running. Auntie was on her way to the door of the box when the terrified person in front of her slammed the door so hard that it locked. She couldn't get out of the door of her own box, nor

[1] THE COMPLETE FAIRY TALES AND STORIES, by *Hans Christian Andersen.* Translated from the Danish by *Erik Christian Haugaard.* Doubleday. $15.00.

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could she climb into any of the neighboring boxes, for the partitions were too high.

She screamed, but no one heard her. She looked down at the circle of boxes below her; it didn't seem far. In her fear, Auntie felt all the agility of youth returning to her: she would jump down! She got one leg over the balustrade but could not manage to get the other one over. There she sat as if she were riding a horse, with her skirt tucked up under her and her long leg with the sled boot on it hanging in the air. It was a sight! And it was seen and Auntie was saved from her death in flames—which was not so strange, for the theater wasn't burning at all.

It was the most memorable evening in her life, she often remarked; and it was a good thing that she could not have seen herself sitting on the balustrade, for if she had been able to she would have died of shame.

Eventually Auntie dies not of shame but of old age, having supped full with horrors and useful information, and her exit line is the all-important unanswered question:

> Auntie deserved to live as long as the Royal Theater stood, but few people get what they deserve. She didn't die in her box either, but decently, at home, in her bed. Her last words are worth quoting: "What are they playing tomorrow?" she asked.

If only the palace of illusions had treated young Andersen as well as it treated Auntie! His application to the Royal Theater in Copenhagen was turned down with the comment that he "lack[ed] both the talent and the appearance necessary for the stage." But of course they were right, weren't they? and the ugly duckling just hadn't found his proper pond yet. Nevertheless he wangled an audition from an actor named Lindgreen, who "told him he had some talent for comic parts, but unfortunately Andersen wanted to play tragic or sentimental parts":

> Lindgreen was adamant, however: "Good gracious, my dear child, your appearance is against you. People would only laugh at such a lanky hero!" All the same he allowed him to learn Correggio's monologue from Oehlenschläger's tragedy. When he played it to Lindgreen, Andersen was so moved by his own performance that he burst into tears. Lindgreen pressed his hand and said, "You have a heart, and by God you also have a head, but you mustn't go on wasting your time here. You ought to study! You're no good as an actor, but there are other wonderful things as well as acting."[2]

Whereupon, at the urging of his friends, Andersen reluctantly went off to grammar school! this naïve and ungainly youth of seventeen looming among the eleven-year-olds, for five years of belated formal education; returned to Copenhagen not a scholar but a poet; soon was adapting and

[2] HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN, by *Elias Bredsdorff*. Scribner's. $10.00.

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inventing the fairy tales with their blend of fantasy, comedy, and pathos that established his world fame; at length achieved the skill and detachment that enabled him to transmute the miseries of his early years into the mellow realism of stories like "Auntie." Or so Bredsdorff's biography, a painstaking and unenamored account of a very peculiar life, pretty much says.

This very peculiar person, so the account goes, gradually settled into his proper place as one of the great story-tellers of the world. But the evidence won't bear examination: perhaps the best stories—for example "Auntie" (whose sustained and unforced geniality doesn't appear anywhere else in Andersen)—are the work of a great story-teller; but many of the others seem to have been written or at least skewed by the unprepossessing and moony young reject nursing his grievance, by the suppliant in the wings, the tender ham who was "so moved by his own performance that he burst into tears," the out-sized and over-aged schoolboy with a turn for high-minded moist-eyed verses. The fact is that most ugly ducklings grow up to be ugly ducks, and fairy tales don't do their job by tampering with the truth.

Andersen is less interested in truth than in high-mindedness and justice. "The Swineherd" is one of his better tales—an adaptation, and his adaptations are usually simpler and livelier than his inventions—it's about a prince wooing a beautiful (what else?) and spoiled (who cares?) princess; so far so good, until Andersen reverses the original happy ending and sees to it that the prince casts her off because the princess quite forgivably prefers a couple of charming gadgets to God's precious little creatures (a rose and a nightingale): " 'I have come to despise you,' said the prince"; vindictively abandons her in a pouring rain out in the middle of nowhere; "entered his own kingdom and locked the door behind him." Andersen seems to think he does justice to the beauty of women by pretending that what gives so much pleasure has no special privileges. But Perrault, one of Andersen's predecessors, knows just what sort of acknowledgment a true prince owes to a beautiful princess (in "Ricky of the Tuft"): "Beauty is so great an advantage that everything else can be disregarded; and I do not see that the possessor of it can have anything much to grieve about." Moreover the Grimm brothers, doting on the beautiful and spoiled princess of "The Frog-King," don't let some silly promises she has made to the frog get in the way of her amphibicidal revulsion when he demands that she take him to bed with her:

> "I'm tired, I want to sleep as much as you do: pick me up, or I'll tell your father." Then she really got angry, picked him up, and threw him against the wall with all her might: "Now you can go to sleep if you like, you nasty frog!"
>
> But when he fell he wasn't a frog but a prince . . .

and of course they live happily ever after. In the world's wish-books virtue is its own reward but beauty takes the cake. Who—certainly not Chaucer!—would ever think of punishing zesty and beautiful Alisoun of *The Miller's Tale* for cuckolding her old husband, humiliating one of her suitors, having a wonderful time herself, and generally making the world a wilder place for anybody who lays his eyes or hands on her?

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Andersen persuades himself that fairy tales aren't fiction (articulate fears and wishes, reasonable dreams) but lessons, as for instance: nature is better than art (for towering oaks from teeny acorns grow), feeling is better than thinking, ignorance is better than learning, children are better than grownups ("I can't give her any more power than she already has! Don't you understand how great it is? . . . it is in her heart, for she is a sweet and innocent child"), funerals are better than weddings, mothers are better than people—

> The poor mother kissed the dead child and then kissed the rose, before she placed it on the young girl's breast, as if she hoped that the freshness of a rose and a mother's kiss could make the girl's heart beat again.
>
> The petals of the rose shook with happiness. It was as if the whole rose swelled and grew. "I have become more than a rose, for, like a child, I have received a mother's kiss. I have been blessed and will travel into the unknown realm, dreaming on the dead girl's breast. Truly, I am the happiest of us all."

—(when there are no swelling roses available, Andersen rhymes his pubescent girls with tumescent pearls: "The girl said, '. . . I feel within my closed hand the glow of the jewel. I can feel it pulse and swell . . .' "), as a matter of fact though God is good ("To Him alone belongs all honor") people are no damn good ("the trash, the cheap tinsel that mankind considered beautiful"), ugly is gorgeous, poor is rich, ad infinitum and caveat emptor. Whoever has read only the few most often reprinted stories (chiefly adaptations) of Andersen's wouldn't guess that most of his hundred and fifty-six are nondenominational tracts, homilies, exempla, with the mixture of mush ("who can distinguish between raindrops and tears of happiness?"), bluff, archness, and spite characteristic of such productions, though usually Andersen's make a not necessarily laudable effort to disguise themselves as fairy tales.

Some of the best-known tales—e.g. "The Little Mermaid," "The Snow Queen," "The Ice-Maiden"—don't even observe the blessed folk convention of brevity; they have their moments (especially "The Ice-Maiden," in which the fine realistic account of a courtship doesn't deserve to be juxtaposed and confused with the claptrap supernaturalism) but they tend to trail off into mazes of fancy, sentiment, Victorian trash and tinsel: Andersen and Dickens were mutual admirers, and much of Andersen reads like the worst of Dickens: "The Little Match Girl," "Grief," "The Dead Child," "She Was No Good." When Andersen is doing an adaptation of a highly vertebrate folk tale that resists invention and pathos and coy asides—as for example "The Emperor's New Clothes," "The Tinderbox," "The Princess and the Pea," "Little Claus and Big Claus," "What Father Does Is Always Right"—he can be economical and entertaining, and give evidence of the great storyteller's conscience and sense of pace and rhythm. On his own though he has too many options, his detail is often distracting and irresponsible, the sort that passes itself off in the

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abominable deserts of children's literature as "imaginative": "He did not ride away on a horse: no, he mounted an ostrich, for that could run faster. But as soon as he saw the wild swans he picked out the strongest among them and rode on that instead, for he liked a change" ("The Philosopher's Stone").

The best of the world's fairy tales have a symmetry and a cutting edge that are quite beyond even the best of Andersen. Puss of Perrault's "Puss in Boots" advances through his series of challenges so cleverly and so gracefully that we readers would bet Puss's boots that he won't miss a beat coming up with the most elegant and most profitable means of disposal for the very ogre of ogres:

> Finally Master Puss reached a splendid castle, which belonged to an ogre. He was the richest ogre that had ever been known, for all the lands through which the king had passed were part of the castle domain. . . .
>
> The ogre received him as civilly as an ogre can, and bade him sit down.
>
> "I have been told," said Puss, "that you have the power to change yourself into any kind of animal—for example, that you can transform yourself into a lion or an elephant."
>
> "That is perfectly true," said the ogre, curtly, "and just to prove it you shall see me turn into a lion."
>
> Puss was so frightened on seeing a lion before him that he sprang onto the roof—not without difficulty and danger, for his boots were not meant for walking on the tiles.
>
> Perceiving presently that the ogre had abandoned his transformation, Puss descended, and owned to having been thoroughly frightened.
>
> "I have also been told," he added, "but I can scarcely believe it, that you have the further power to take the shape of the smallest animals—for example, that you can change yourself into a rat or a mouse. I confess that to me it seems quite impossible."
>
> "Impossible,?" cried the ogre; "you shall see!" And in the same moment he changed himself into a mouse, which began to run around the floor. No sooner did Puss see it than he pounced on it and ate it.

That's all for the ogre, whose domain (presumably devolving on Puss by right of transubstantiation) faithful Puss delivers to his master. Andersen, trying to work the same magic (in "How to Cook Soup upon a Sausage Pin"), turns Perrault's witty cat into a mouse who's as stupid as an ogre and stupidly tells us how he expects to become wise: "The queen ant . . . stood up on her two hind legs, you couldn't mistake any of the lesser ants for her, and I ate her. 'Go to the ant and become wise.' Now I have swallowed the queen." But then Andersen doesn't know mice whereas Perrault is an expert on cats and ogres, in "Little Tom Thumb" he goes so far as to put on exhibition a whole ogre family:

> Now the ogre had seven daughters who as yet were only children. These little ogresses all had the most lovely complexions, for, like their

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> father, they ate fresh meat. But they had little round gray eyes, crooked noses, and very large mouths, and long and exceedingly sharp teeth, set far apart. They were not so very wicked at present, but they showed great promise, for already they were in the habit of killing little children to suck their blood.
>
> They had gone to bed early, and were all seven in a great bed, each with a crown of gold upon her head.

Those golden crowns are the crowning touch, surely just the thing for a philoprogenitive ogre bent on pampering his little darlings.

Andersen, on the other hand, has a thing about virtue, he doesn't find enough innocence and piety in the world to suit him, he often stamps his foot with vexation and sinks into lugubriousness, though never quite so uninhibitedly as the Grimms' dwarf Rumpelstilzcken when the Queen outsmarts him and saves her child:

> "The Devil told you! the Devil told you!" screamed the dwarf and in his anger drove his right foot so deep into the ground that he went down to his waist. Then in his rage he seized his left foot with both hands and tore himself right in two.

Perrault and the Grimms, don't insist so much on what the world ought to be, they are content to find it full of passion, mother-wit, daring, competitiveness, ambition, the natural affections. Life is a mixed bag, and stories aren't moral lessons. When the Grimms tell the story of "The Fisherman and His Wife," they don't deplore or moralize the wife's ambition as from humble beginnings (she lives with her husband "in a pisspot by the sea," and "it's too wretched to live forever in a pisspot; it stinks and is so shitty") she rockets to level beyond level of glory:

> "Oh, wife, how nice that you're king. Now let's not wish for anything more." "Well, husband," said the woman and got quite restless, "time's hanging heavy on my hands and I can't stand it any longer. Go to the flounder! I'm king, and now I must become emperor as well." "Oh, wife," said the man, "why do you want to be emperor?" "Husband," she said, "go to the flounder! I want to be emperor." . . .
>
> Meanwhile he got to the sea, and the sea was all black and soupy and began to boil up so that it made bubbles, and such a gale passed over the surface that it stirred it, and the man was frightened. But he stepped up and said,
>
> "Manntje, manntje, timpe te,
> Flounder, flounder in the sea!
> My wife Ilsebill
> Doesn't want what I really want."
>
> "Well, what does she want?" said the flounder. "Alas, flounder," he said, "my wife wants to be emperor." "Just go back," said the flounder, "she's emperor already."

Now emperor, that's something!

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Then the man went back, and when he got there, the whole mansion was of polished marble with alabaster figures and golden ornaments. Soldiers were marching before the door, blowing trumpets and beating drums and kettledrums, and within barons and counts and dukes were walking about as servants and opened the doors for him, and these were of solid gold. And when he went in, there was his wife sitting on a throne wrought of a single piece of gold and two miles high, and she had on a golden crown three yards high and set with brilliants and carbuncles. In one hand she held the scepter and in the other the imperial apple. On both sides she was flanked by satellites standing in two rows, each person shorter than the next, ranging in size from the tallest giant, who was two miles tall, to the tiniest dwarf only as big as my little finger. And before her were standing many princes and dukes. Then the man stepped up and said, "wife, are you now emperor?" "Yes," she said, "I'm emperor." Then he stopped and took a good look at her and, after looking at her for some time, he said, "Oh, wife, how nice that you're emperor." "Husband," she said, "why are you standing there? Now that I'm emperor, I want to be pope, too. Go to the flounder!" . . .

Faint-hearted husband notwithstanding, pope is all right too; and the flounder balks at last only when the wife demands the one office that never has a vacancy:

She thought, "Aha! couldn't I, too, make the sun and moon rise?" "Husband," she said and nudged him in the ribs with her elbow, "wake up and go to the flounder. I want to be like God." . . . "Oh, wife," said the husband, falling on his knees before her, "the flounder can't do that. It can make an emperor and a pope. I pray you, think it over and remain pope." Then she got angry, her hair flew wildly about her head, she tore her bodice, and gave him a kick, screaming, "I simply won't stand it any longer. Will you go!" Then he put on his trousers and ran off like mad.

Outside a storm was raging so that he could scarcely stay on his feet. Houses and trees were falling, the mountains shaking, and great boulders rolling down into the sea. The sky was absolutely pitch-black, there was thunder and lightning, and the sea was throwing up black waves as high as church steeples and mountains, and all with crests of white foam. Then he shouted but couldn't hear his own voice,

"Manntje, manntje, timpe te,
Flounder, flounder in the sea!
My wife Ilsebill
Doesn't want what I want at all."

"Well, what does she want?" said the flounder. "Oh," he said, "she wants to be like God." "Just go home, she's back in the pisspot again."

To this day they're still sitting there.

The moral of this story is: It doesn't hurt to try.

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PETER GLASSMAN

Acts of Enclosure

THERE CAN BE FEW MORE APPEALING words in the English language than the word "self." "Personality," "character," "individuality," "identity," "sensibility," "consciousness" all will propose themselves to us as attractive terms, and the varieties of assumption which they undertake to represent will be likely to engage and delight us. The word "self," though, is uniquely compelling in its charm, uniquely inviting in its energy of expectation and of hope. For the word seems to us, I think, not simply to convey a blunt meaning but also to confer a sublime promise. As the term passes before our eye or in its gentle way enters of its own accord into our consciousness, we derive from it the connotative ideal of human particularity, the virtually religious awareness of those essential qualities of form and spirit which discriminate one individual person from all others. We shall be likely as well to receive from the word the suggestive sense of a yet larger provocation and presumption. We shall discover a welcome implication of pledge that we each may actively participate in this kind of particularized identification; an impression of promise that we each may be born into the identified life as that life is expressed and lived—especially as it is lived by persons in literature. The word "self" in this sense commonly will make us think of Clarissa Harlowe, perhaps, or of Tom Jones, or of the poet who speaks above Tintern Abbey. We shall think of Dorothea Brooke, or of Pip; or of Isabel Archer, or of Gudrun Brangwen. Of itself the word reminds us of the actualness of these invented sensibilities, and of their heroic authenticity; and it permits us to suppose that we may hope to shape our own, historical arcs as richly as these artful beings shape their fictive ones.

But if we consider the actual fortunes of such strongly particularized persons within literature itself, we may feel less hopefully charged by the word "self" and its presumable economies of promise. For nothing more characterizes imaginative literature than its fixed conviction that in all the settings of human life the "self" exists in an extraordinarily fragile condition. In this regard literature is fully persuaded that particularly in the setting of society—which literature normally describes as the entire ground of our humanity—the "self" experiences severe prohibitions against its authority. One may make a yet more disturbing observation. With one or another degree of intensity, imaginative literature commonly contends that, however forbidding in their might, the institutions and energies of situational exteriority do not comprise the greatest impediment to a person's ability to experience personal satiation. The conditions which most fiercely assault fictional beings are seldom purely natural ones. Literature proposes, rather, that it is the circumstance of human exteriority to itself, of human estrangement from the human, which most radically threatens the irreducible psychic needs of its created characters.

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All works of literature declare, I believe, that the forces of malevolent will which are developed and exerted against the "self" by the collective community of humankind and by the internal agencies of the individual personality decisively compromise the ability of every human being to establish himself in felt pleasure and, perhaps more important, in felt authenticity.

Although this presumption obviously has informed the dramatic activity of imaginative literature at least since the creation of *The Iliad,* literature's fear of society and its suspicion about the resources of the self have increased in point of insistency (and in point, curiously, of general social acceptableness) precisely as humankind has felt society to have increased the complexity of its structures and the peremptoriness of its demands. In its modern age the literature particularly of western Europe and the Americas has commonly proposed that the ideational and even the passional weight of the social has become so commanding in the enormity of its pressure against the personal as to bring into serious question the very actualness of human particularity. It has become the principal concern of our literature to inquire whether the self may be considered any longer even to exist as a locus of capable will, any longer even to survive as the site of verifiable human desire, energy, and consequence. As we read *Clarissa,* for example, we shall recognize that however many obstructions Clarissa's community, her family, and her suitors together bring to bear against her defining desires and needs, the excellent Miss Harlowe primarily blocks herself from entering into the opportunities and occasions of human existence. Similarly, *Middlemarch* makes us know that Dorothea impedes her own existence more directly and brutally than her community ever imagines to do. No one impinges more against lovely Pip than Pip himself. A great many exterior forces contrive against Gudrun in *Women in Love.* But taken even in their totality, these forces seem less pitilessly obdurate in their opposition to Gudrun's interests of life than is Gudrun herself. Literature makes us know that the dark and devious, manipulative, obsessional operations of the human character commonly contend against the human character more powerfully than even the structures of society and of universe. Literature makes us know that the constituent interior agencies of the mind invariably organize themselves in covert alliance with the communal against the well-being of the singular. Literature makes us know that the fortunes of the individual personality are normally contained, or actually annulled, by the behavioral activity *of* the individual personality.

The literature of autobiography, in particular, seems to me conspicuous for its insistent recognition that human life as it is lived in modern society perforce involves one in containment and enclosure before self and before Other. Most autobiographers, I believe, work from the suspicion that the boundaries of their own existence have become effectively eroded; from the suspicion that other people, and they themselves, may not be able to locate and respond to their own sensibility in its precise, presumably precious, particularity. Rousseau contends in *The Second Discourse,* for

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example, that there exists a sense in which "all individuals . . . are nothing." In a letter to Malesherbes he complains that "in myself I found an unexplainable void that nothing could have filled." On the evening of his sixty-third birthday, while composing one of his annual reflections upon the quality of his existence, Samuel Johnson finds it possible to speak of "the general disease of my life." In *Sartor Resartus* Carlyle tells us that he regards himself as "a feeble unit in the middle of a threatening Infinitude." In *Pendennis* Thackeray proclaims the radicalness of his isolation, and the extremity of his sense of dissolution. "How alone we are in the world!—," he writes, "alone on the hopeless span, drowning out of sight; alone in the midst of the crowd applauding you." Conrad confesses, in one of his remarkable letters to Cunninghame Graham, "I can not help thinking of the day when you shall find me out or rather find out that there is nothing there." In *Nausea* Sartre has Roquentin announce: "The essential thing is contingency . . . In themselves, secretly, [everyone is] *superfluous,* that is to say, amorphous, vague, and sad." John Stuart Mill and Charles Darwin, Thomas DeQuincey and Conrad, even the sublimely instinctive Matthew Arnold: each finds occasion in his autobiographical writing to disclose his fear that he may be no more than a species of horrid, inanimate machine. Autobiographers otherwise so diverse from one another as Cowper, Gibbon, Harriet Martineau, Gosse, J. R. Ackerley, and Albert Speer all construct their discourse from within a terrified impression of personal nongenuineness and unparticularity; from within a terrified consciousness of individual deprivation and discreation.

For such authors the act of writing autobiography offers itself as an occasion not for celebration, but for commencing one's existence as a personality. I believe that most autobiographers create their discourse in order to conceive and sustain a self other than that which they have established—or which they have failed to establish—in their engagement of actual experience. The autobiographer, I believe, typically undertakes to press the resources of language in ways in which he has been unable to press the resources of history. He endeavors to elaborate from words that sense of reality, that feeling of freed individuation, which the components of his desperately mediated life have not permitted him experientially to develop. For such beings the act of writing autobiography declares itself not as a first but as a last emotion of life; not as a hymn to peace and plenty, but as a final, extraordinarily inventive attempt at therapy. For such beings the act of existing as a "self" evidently has more to do with diminishment and deficiency than with possibility or promise.

In spite of the burden of pain which it so often represents, the literature of the self increasingly engages us. It seems fair to say that at the moment no other genre of literature commands more critical curiosity or excitement than that of autobiography. Courses in autobiographical literature are being designed at most of our colleges and universities; students enroll in these new colloquia in great numbers, and with great expectations of achieving discovery—of deriving actual personal use from such courses of

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reading. Our publishers offer us a bewildering array of documents. The autobiographical writings of Paustovski, Herzen, and Speer, of every conceivable inhabitant of Bloomsbury, of every conceivable performing artist, sportsman, scientist, and political personage have been placed into print for the sake, presumably, of satisfying an inexhaustible public appetite for works of this kind. With these phenomena I am inclined to connect our society's peculiar interest in gossip. Hollywood gossip, high-fashion gossip, newspaper talebearing, magazines such as *People* and *Us;* political scandaling, call-in radio shows and television "talk" shows, as we oddly term them; confession chronicles, smear magazines, sneer magazines; television programs—and now, once again, films—which appear in sequential series; soap operas, and advertising campaigns which behave as if they were soap operas: all these productions for the contemporary marketplace testify, I believe, to our extreme curiosity about "selves," and our radical interest in the life of particularized human individuation as it may be thought to be developed both by ourselves and by other people. I go so far as to believe that the creation in our time of the science of ethology proceeds from this interest. We have become attracted as a people to the life of "self" even as that life may be imagined to be experienced by insects and by animals—perhaps even, given the recent outpouring of literature about plantlife, as it may be imagined to be experienced by plants. Certainly the intensity of our current interest in personal religious conversion emanates from our sense of imaginative commitment to the life of identified being. Our contemporary fascination with the experience of being brought into individual, highly charged relationship with the godhead seems to me scarcely theological in either its origin or its reference. We describe such conversions as "awakenings"; we say, without embarrassment, that such persons have been "born again." We imply in every way permitted by the language that we are interested in such persons because we believe them to have discovered not the Christ, but themselves: we are intrigued by them because we consider that they perhaps learn to conceive of themselves *as* selves. Obviously the society admires warriors and athletes, particularly professional athletes, for similar reason. It seems to us that the modes of organized gladiatorial existence permit one, or indeed require one, daily to discover oneself as a self.

It is as a portion of this general burgeoning of interest in the life and literature of the self that the Oxford University Press has recently begun the republication of all Fanny Burney's journals and correspondence.[1] There exist few more valuable, and certainly few more impressively man-

[1] THE JOURNALS AND LETTERS OF FANNY BURNEY, Vol. I (1791–1792), edited by *Joyce Hemlow* with *Curtis D. Cecil* and *Althea Douglas*, $16.25; Vol. II (1793), edited by *Joyce Hemlow* and *Althea Douglas*, $16.25; Vol. III (1793–1797), edited by *Joyce Hemlow* with *Patricia Boutilier* and *Althea Douglas*, $16.00; Vol. IV (1797–1801), edited by *Joyce Hemlow*, $24.00; Vol. V (1801–1803), edited by *Joyce Hemlow, George G. Falle, Althea Douglas, Jill A. Bourdais de Charbonnière*, $42.50; Vol. VI (1803–1812), edited by *Joyce Hemlow, George G. Falle, Althea Douglas, Jill A. Bourdais de Charbonnière*, $33.75. All volumes from Oxford University Press.

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aged, contemporary scholarly projects. The individual volumes of the edition which have appeared so far are as handsome in appearance as they are useful in editorial apparatus. The sensible textual notes provided by Joyce Hemlow and her colleagues are models of tact and erudition. The volumes themselves are superbly sturdy, clean of line, congenial to the eye and to the needs of both the casual and the expert reader. The volumes are expensive, but for reason: they have been created with their classicality and probable permanency of use, directly in mind. All of this is to say that *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney* embraces the standards which we have come to expect of work issued by our foremost publisher.

The work makes nothing less than a wonderful experience of reading. Fanny Burney endured, I suppose, an improbably circumstanced, an appallingly circumscribed, existence. But the life which she conducted, marked as it was by her willful, by her no doubt actually diseased, submission to imposed and invented criteria of behavior, educates us into the processes by which the human intelligence may undertake to limit the possible range of its own knowledge and pleasure. Fanny Burney repeatedly brings us to understand how the life of a human being as it is lived in a highly developed community may come to involve a continual and drastic corruption of individual energy and truthfulness. The mass of material which this splendid edition comprises expresses nothing so much as the loss, as the deliberate disavowal, of a particular person's power to discover the life of particularized identification. Fanny Burney's existence as it is memorialized in her writing shapes itself solely about presentations and elocutions. Her life orders itself exclusively about arrangements of data, accumulations of decisions, superintendence of ceremonies. She commits her considerable intelligence wholly to the encounter of attitudes and of circumstances: she systematically, ostentatiously denies her desires (save for her desire to deny herself). Fanny Burney seems to have moved through the universe as she moves through these volumes of her work: happy, healthy, but perfectly unactivated in point of self-understanding and self-avowal. Sincere, authentic, spectacularly consistent, Fanny Burney entered perhaps not once into the life of singularized, primary being.

As we read the captivating accounts of her days and ways, we may discover how social Fanny Burney's society was. The beings who populate the world of her journals and correspondence—and it is a world which is recorded in these volumes—appear to center their sensibilities exclusively about their relations with others. As we confront the routines of their public display and are made privy to the patterns of their chronicler's private reflections, we must feel struck by the smallness of the universe which human beings once were required, or permitted, to inhabit. Fanny Burney and her acquaintances knew, really, very few people, and they knew them unintimately. They entertained few possibilities of assumption. They moved through an ensphered provision of geographical space. They authorized the least venturesome sorts of psychic involvement with one another, and with themselves. Simple amiableness seems to have served these good, gracious souls as an entire repertoire of sensation.

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Conviviality (and grief before others' illnesses and deaths) seems to have satisfied all of their emotional needs. As one enters into the cosmology which is preserved and presented by Fanny Burney's record, one begins to believe that the whole generation of her contemporaries neither knew, nor felt impelled to discover anything about life as we know it: the life of harsh, necessitous spiritual extremity. The journals and the letters of this deeply stabilized woman produce the impression of an absolutely contained personal and social conception of "self." They give the sense that Fanny Burney and her acquaintances conspired together to restrict their own singularity; that they operated together in unconscious league to repudiate the authority, to repudiate even the reality, of their own affective wills. However unsettling, the processes by which this fixed and fixated woman refuses to enter her appropriate arc, the mechanisms by which this entire community of historical persons refuses to engage its own possible history, make for a fascinating and most suggestive exhibition. Fanny Burney unwittingly teaches us in her brilliantly evocative discourse how the human subconscious may reach out to surround and devastate one's larger apparatus of life. Her work permits us to observe the actual procedures by which the mind may learn to lay waste its own proffered field, and so to contaminate its being with its terror of being.

This said, and so much as this must be said, it should also be remarked that Fanny Burney finally could not sterilize herself. Part of what is attractive and exciting about her work is the fact that it makes us aware of so much arduously preserved human energy. Like a dancer who accepts inhibiting forms, an athlete who works within restricting environments of opportunity, or an animal who is obliged to exist in confinement, Fanny Burney throughout her volumes (and, I believe, exactly by writing her volumes) creates occasions of profound, though decisively encased, personal expression. She achieves such moments by exploiting, apparently, a sheer appetite for being; a gross, otherwise unacknowledged, insistency of will. She is no dancer, no athlete, no animal. One takes from her discourse, though, frequent and delightful indications of lambency of mind, strong glimmerings of suppleness and of sensibility. The resources of intelligence, the reserves of wit and of robust sensation which Fanny Burney manages to discover within the small interstices of space she permits herself to inhabit, propose themselves as a testament to the resilience of her—and of the human—spirit. As we encounter the literature created by this stark, severely contained woman we ultimately encounter not simply a series of diaries and letters but the record of a long, diurnal struggle for courage, the account of the heroic subterranean effort by an archaic and badly frightened personality to overcome its own obsessive tendencies and terrified needs.

As I have said, Fanny Burney committed her life to the disavowal of her life. Yet, as we read these superbly designed volumes we shall discover that the good Miss Burney's impulses for existence were at last too strong to consent entirely to her instinctive internal animus against them. As we read this new edition of her work we shall recognize that, as demonstrated in Fanny Burney's case, one's sad, inward necessities of character need

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not be wholly accommodated, however fully they must be acted upon in the forum of the world. *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney* offer themselves as a drama both of denial and of development. Not all, perhaps not even many, of the fortunes of the human self are there to be witnessed. Those which are, though, must draw from the work's readers the most intense sensations of sympathy and participation.

Patricia Meyer Spacks conducts a suggestive and sane discussion of Fanny Burney's autobiographical writings in her new book.[2] Professor Spacks speaks as well to the autobiographies of Cowper, Gibbon, Cibber, and Boswell, and to certain of the novels of Defoe, Sterne, Richardson, Fielding, and several of the commercially successful eighteenth-century English women novelists. Her essay expresses a profound and I think deeply American interest in the life of singularized identification—an interest so intense in its attraction and impassioned in its avowal as to suggest that *Imagining a Self* proposes itself to Professor Spacks as not simply a critical study but as itself a variety of autobiographical undertaking.

It is the interesting, if not precisely novel, premise of Professor Spacks's book that the achievement, and in some instances the very sanity, of the writers whom she engages became centered upon their experience of enclosure. It seems to Professor Spacks that each of her authors (and particularly Fanny Burney) exploits the situation of social and psychological confinement in such a way as to generate forms and energies of self-declaration exactly from within the materials of imaginative self-denial. A writer like Fanny Burney, Professor Spacks proposes, "can use her fantasies to communicate her feelings and her conflicts, the interior drama that her decorous life largely concealed." For such authors, she contends, the act of producing autobiographical discourse allows one "to convey the impermissible sides of [one's] nature and to enlarge the permissible." She suggests, in this connection, that especially "the female of the species" often manages by writing "self-depicting fantasy" to make "a mythology of her victimization, verbally converting it into the badge of her freedom . . . . Women writing about themselves defend integrity both by the declaration of the self implicit in the writing process and by the retelling of what they have endured, individually and generically." It seems to Professor Spacks that writing of this kind demonstrates "to an audience, real or imagined, the integrity and significance of individual identity, and thus [makes] that identity real." In this sense, Professor Spacks believes, "to tell one's story . . . becomes an affirmation of power." The texts of these "tales" accordingly seem to her "fundamentally optimistic modes."

The essay's argument is an inviting one, suggesting as it does a firm ground of support for our faith in the paradisal life of "selfhood" and for

[2] IMAGINING A SELF: AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND NOVEL IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND, by Patricia Meyer Spacks. Harvard University Press. $15.00.

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our hope that we may develop the capacity individually to enter into that life. As by now will be apparent, though, I stand at a considerable distance from the lines of Professor Spacks's pleasant assumption. It seems to me, again, that autobiographical writing frequently, perhaps normally, operates as a variety of *flight* from the experience of individuation; as an expression of an author's consignment of his undiscovered particularity to the less visibly evanescent authority of the Other. It seems to me that one "tells one's story" because one doubts the actualness of one's interior identification. The autobiographer implicitly testifies, I believe, to his final acceptance of enclosure. I am, he declares, that which You take me to be; I am more comfortable, more nearly expressed, as I explain myself to You than as I receive myself from within. In my judgment, the literature of autobiography is anything but "optimistic." It seems to me more commonly funereal, a proclamation in adagio of one's acceptance of the Other in lieu of the authentically interior.

I have several other disagreements with *Imagining a Self*. The book repeatedly suggests, for example, that the creative activity and the actual narrative structures of fiction are fully compatible with those of autobiography; novel and autobiography share, the essay insistently asserts, strategic intention and "narrative mode." This impulse to connect absolutely the genre of the novel with that of autobiography seems to me perplexing and precarious. Professor Spacks twice finds occasion to ask, astonishingly, "Does genre make any difference?" Undoubtedly it does, here and always. The work seems to me unconsidered and offensive, too, in its harsh, often somewhat hysterical, segregation of women from men. *Imagining a Self* repeatedly undertakes to locate certain qualities of vision and certain impulses of need exclusively by gender. Such notions, however fashionable, are nonsensical and vulgar. For better as for worse, humankind presumably exists in a more fully joined community of impetus, urge, and aim. We all, not simply those of us who are women, hope to achieve "rational structure," "propriety," and "order." We all, not simply those of us who are men, know what it is to fear and to suffer from "a terror of impotence." I feel a final, more small, instinct of protest. It will surprise and disappoint most of us, I believe, that *Imagining a Self* fails to engage Samuel Johnson's diaries, prayers, and annals. I think that not many more affecting and important autobiographical documents were produced by an Englishman in the eighteenth century.

In spite of these instances of disagreement and dissent, I consider *Imagining a Self* an uncommonly coherent, provocative, and well-written book. Professor Spacks's scholarship, as always, is richly resourceful, and her prose more than ever an instrument of delicacy and grace. Her abundant gift for closely focused analytical exegesis has never before been more acute, or so generously offered. Then too, her work proffers a richly supported consciousness of the act of writing and its implications; her essay speaks ably and eloquently, this is to say, of "the connection of imagination to action."

Most important, most interesting, *Imagining a Self* is suffused with

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curiosity and delight before the processes by which human beings identify and project their particular sensibilities. As I have suggested earlier, the work in some measure cannot be thought to offer itself as simply a critical study. It offers itself as well as an edifice akin to those "self-depicting" structures which Professor Spacks identifies so well. Like the authors who attract her sympathy, Professor Spacks invents in her book a mechanism of "'avoidance," an apparatus of "retreat," a language of concealment, by means of which she feels herself empowered to delineate something of her own distinctive quality as a self. Certainly this procedure on occasion leads to excess if *Imagining a Self* be received as a work purely of criticism. The essay's impulse to discriminate rigidly the feminine from the masculine, for example, makes for conspicuously extravagant assertions. I suspect, though, that Professor Spacks permits herself to commit this extravagance because doing so allows her the opportunity to define more closely her own experience of femininity, and to encounter more directly her own response to masculinity. I imagine, similarly, that Professor Spacks allows herself so closely and excessively to connect the genres of autobiography and novel because inwardly she desires that the many distinctions between autobiographical and critical discourse may be made equally to disappear. By allowing herself certain liberties of judgment in *Imagining a Self*, Professor Spacks discovers, I believe, an opened exultation of spirit and a deeper particularity of person. *Imagining a Self* is so excited and exciting a critical work because, I believe, it extends to its author new methodology and new ground for personal knowledge. However controlled, however enclosed, the occasion for individual exploration and display which Professor Spacks establishes for herself by writing about the "self-depicting" practice of others presents itself as an unexpected and intriguing achievement.

I am proposing that one may discern in *Imagining a Self* that which one discerns in *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*. As one reads the work one is drawn into connection with a strong (and no doubt a strongly supervised) intelligence which strongly loves the ideal of singularness, and which begins by writing about its love to extend its own experience. Professor Spacks's excitation, her circumstanced but finally situated joy, establishes the fact that the book provides its author with an expanded territory for personal expression. For this reason *Imagining a Self* in some respect will flirt with us as do *Clarissa, Tom Jones, Great Expectations,* and the other works mentioned earlier. In its quietly exultant cadences the study proclaims to us that there is such an entity as the "self," and that every being may come to participate in the authority and autonomy which the energies of desired selfhood may be thought to confer upon the human existence. This elegant and soberly equipped meditation bears us, then, something of a gift. Although I cannot share the ground of its knowledge and its hope, I recognize Professor Spacks's essay as a generous and various work which clearly deserves the wide audience it solicits.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Merely Fiction

IT IS DECEMBER AS I WRITE, and the fiction published this fall just passed is cause for neither despair nor renewed enthusiasm about novels *now*. Even more than usual they turn out to be about the splendors and miseries of love, licit and of course forbidden. And though distinctions can be made between American and British, old and young, the established and the upcoming, one doesn't find many occasions for telling off incompetents or usefully encouraging youthful steps in the right direction. So I begin this chronicle by not reviewing but simply harking back to the best novel I read last summer, by a mile Paul Theroux's.[1] This intelligent, clever, strongly-written book about a bunch of oddly-assorted South London revolutionists—written knowingly, knowing that Conrad and James and Graham Greene have been there before—got good publicity, so good that it then became fashionable to hold back from it as a Book of the Month Club choice, dangerous for serious readers to admire. It is a novel that for me exists vividly at the level of the language really used by (some) men—"Now get off my tits," says a hood named Ron Weech—and that is richly plotted, also convincingly placed. I urge that it be read by all common readers as well as ones particularly interested in Theroux's career.

It's possible to claim that the fall's best novel has been Renata Adler's.[2] One blanches a bit to find, on the jacket, that both Updike and Barthelme are puffing it (though it's been a big fall for Updike, what with his dishearteningly enthusiastic defense of Kurt Vonnegut in *The New Yorker*), but never mind. The only misguided response to this invigorating and a good bit of the time splendidly witty series of meditations, would be to pretend there is a heroine or even a "particular generation" (as the blurb says) who stand behind it all, and that we are being asked to participate, sympathetically, in a third-dimensional habit of response to "life." Instead Renata Adler is all on the surface, all superficial, as T. S. Eliot praised Ben Jonson for being. We don't get to know or understand anybody, don't learn to contemplate anything more deeply than we had previously; yet a world is created by this active explorer of words and remarkably inventive exploiter of possibility—as here:

> There were, of course, in all such places, compulsory classes in ballet. Boys and girls, in leotards, lying around the resined floor in ballet class, were all instructed to listen, eyes shut, to Chopin or the Firebird or something, and let the mind run freely over whatever the music might suggest, all enjoined particularly to relax. The music played. Pensive children mused. Ambitious children worried. Homesick children

[1] THE FAMILY ARSENAL, by *Paul Theroux*. Houghton-Mifflin. $8.95.
[2] SPEEDBOAT, by *Renata Adler*. Random House. $7.95.

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> grieved. Everyone lay still. Suddenly, the ballet teacher would swoop down and pick up somebody's hand or foot. Newcomers were often startled into a small scream. After the first few times they regained control. Determined then to show how relaxed they were, they would obligingly help to raise the swooped-at hand or foot, try even to anticipate the swoop. "Why, you're not relaxed," the teacher—quite commonly a psychology major, born in Riverdale and recently divorced from an Algerian or Pakistani—would say, in astonishment and reproach. "Look at it. Why, just look at this foot." She would hold the foot a moment, and then let it go. For normally nervous children, there were two possibilities: being left with a raised foot; or being just alert enough to let it drop, not limply, however, as it was meant to fall, but like a stone.

It goes on, but this should be enough to make clear why Adler's must not be confused with Barthelme's dead-pan acrobatics. In her book there is a humanly recognizable sense of life, even though conveyed through no sympathetic consciousness; and her pace and rhythms are more flexible, her sense of humorous timing, her *delivery* (as with good comedians like Bruce or Bob Newhart) a lot more interesting than Barthelme's, he of the pretended stone-face. Adler knows all about summer camps, riding in a 747, or learning in high school a Famous Immortal Poem which stays with you later on, as it did with

> . . . Agnes Betty Cotts, who had gone through the first eleven years of her schooling in some twilight of sexuality and inattention, [and who] became lofty, intellectual, and fierce with this: "So live, that when thy summons comes to join/The innumerable caravan which moves/To that mysterious realm . . ."

And on through the end of "Thanatopsis," that poem *we* all studied, didn't we? In Agnes Betty Cotts's class

> The Speech Arts Coach worked with such diligence and faith on thirty juniors (who had before been know to mutter, derisively, "The Brain," when anyone so much as spoke distinctly in their midst) that all of them subsequently went to college, each with an awful favorite poem in his heart.

That parenthetical mutter about "The Brain" convinced me I was in the presence of a rare and lovely wit.

Adler, or let us say the disembodied voice of this novel, sums up herself and company thus: "We have had some drunks, an occasional psychotic break, eleven divorces, one autistic child, six abortions, two unanticipated homosexuals, several affairs of the sort that are lifelong and quiet and sad, one drowning, two cases of serious illness, one hatred each, no crimes. No crimes is no small thing. We might have run over somebody in high school

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and left the scene." That she and the rest of them did not leave the scene must I think be attributable to the moral worth of their high school principal who says, interrupting the pledge to the flag:

> "It's one nation. Under Gawd. Indivisible. Some of you are saying under Gahd. In fact, most of you. What are your parents going to think? What are your teachers going to think? What are the visitors from Hartford going to think? This is very important. Many of you are college bound. Now say with me, please. Gawd. Again, Gawd, *Un*der Gawd. *In*divisible. Good. Now let's resume. Give it the feeling you're going to give it on graduation day." Her name was Miss Crosby. Crawsby, not Crahsby. We let it pass.

If you can take this as seriously as I can, giving a small cheer for Miss Crawsby, then *Speedboat* may be the book for you.

Renata Adler's epigraph is, appropriately for such a swift-moving, sly-fingered book, from Waugh's *Vile Bodies*. Two longish accounts of heroines growing up, having love affairs, trying to figure out what it all means, could have used liberal doses of Adler's satiric regard, if not Waugh's.[3] Margaret Atwood's lady is an author of gothic novels, such as one called "Lady Oracle," who finds that the world is too much with her (part of her trouble is a husband named Arthur) so stages a fake death and escapes to another country—but of course she doesn't escape. Early in the novel, looking for a disguise and tired of accounts of her "flowing red hair" (snapshots of Margaret Atwood suggest that any coincidence between author and heroine is not very coincidental) she decides to burn it, so lays about herself, cutting it off strand by strand:

> The hair lay in mounds and coils in the bathroom sink. I wanted to save it; I thought briefly of stowing it in a bureau drawer. But how could I explain if it were found? They'd start looking for the arms and legs and the rest of the body. I'd have to get rid of it. I considered flushing it down the toilet, but there was too much of it, and the septic tank had already begun to act up, burping swamp gas and shreds of decomposing toilet paper.

So she burns it ("the smell of singed turkey was overpowering") then begins to weep ("I was a sentimentalist without doubt, of the sloppiest kind") as she thinks how Arthur used to like brushing her hair ("I could never manage the right emotions at the right times, anger when I should have been angry, tears when I should have cried; everything was mismatched").

The mismatching is well-exploited by Atwood for some pleasant-sad comic moments having to do with being a fat girl in Canada, eating

[3]LADY ORACLE, by *Margaret Atwood*. Simon and Schuster. $8.95. LOVERS AND TYRANTS, by *Francine du Plessix Gray*. Simon and Schuster. $8.95.

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through five Mars Bars while she watches "Interrupted Melody" with Eleanor Parker (that moving tale of disability overcome), having not the best of early sexual experience in that she is used by other girls to repel unwanted boys as "a fat duenna, the perfect excuse; it was like having your own private tank." But this sort of thing goes better in high school than beyond, so it is slightly embarrassing to contemplate our hapless, marvelous heroine getting rid of her hair, funny-sad as we are supposed to feel it must be. There is a sophomoric slant to Atwood's humor, especially when directed at situations involving the heroine as sex object, and particularly with a lover called—unfortunately for all of us—the Royal Porcupine. As the book drags on through 37 chapters and over 300 pages it wears out whatever welcome it had. The sentences don't stop on a dime, as Renata Adler hoped hers would, but skid along towards no evident or interesting goal. Six volumes of poetry; three novels: does Margaret Atwood write all too effortlessly?

Francine du Plessix Gray is less problematic, since there is no reason to believe that a passionate, radically-inclined, intelligent and sympathetic chronicler of late-sixties activities, particularly among Catholic radicals, could write a good novel about disorder, early and later sorrows, the life and loves of Stephanie from her childhood in France to her Womanhood in the U. S. of A. Ms. Gray's difficulty is purely a matter of tone and overall solemnity of self-regard, and there may be readers (maybe more women than men?) who can take more seriously than I can thoughts like this:

> And yet through solitude, the brutality of love, the oppression of marriage, the epiphanies of time, there comes a year, a sudden break in life when one stops feeding exclusively on the enjoyment of the present.

or, after a hot-sex bit:

> Simple things really, much tenderness. The isolation, the solitude of sex. The only place we are totally together, totally ourselves, more solitary than ever.

I am perhaps insensitive to the Gallic touch, having been corrupted by Waugh (and Adler), but this book struck me as really embarrassing to read, and not just because—in the fantasy (I guess) which concludes the book our heroine's homosexual buddy tells her things like "making love with Joel was incredible, his sperm was so sweet, it had a very special taste, it carried no semen . . ." Isn't it wrong to make such a fetish out of good taste?

I had been slightly put off by the chilly atmosphere of Ann Beattie's short stories, and from the title of her novel expected further toneless iterations of the banality of life in 1976.[4] Since tears don't well up in my eyes, or the great old days come rushing back at the mention of Wood-

[4] CHILLY SCENES OF WINTER, by *Ann Beattie*. Doubleday. $7.95.

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stock or Janis Joplin, I resolved to be unsympathetic towards any malaise her characters (like Charles and Sam and Pamela Smith) might feel about having to live in the present. Pleasantly enough, the novel surprised me by not feeling all that chilly, but amusing and affectionate rather. As in the following exchange, when Charles (separated from his lover and missing her) cooks a roast for Sam, complete with canned lima beans and bordeaux served in the thermal mugs given away at an earlier point by gas stations. There has been talk of how Charles' Aunt Eleanor berated his mother for not serving parsnips at a meal:

> "Well," Sam says. "This is a fine celebration."
> "I'm glad you like it."
> "Beats Christmas dinner all to hell. She really *had* parsnips, to shut Eleanor up. Have you ever tasted a parsnip?"
> "Not to my knowledge."
> "They're foul. They smell like Vanish."
> "What's that?"
> "Stuff you put down your toilet."
> "Shut up about the toilet when I'm eating."
> "Sorry. I was just thinking about those rotten parsnips."
> "Drop it. I don't want to think about the toilet when I'm eating."
> "More lima beans?" Sam says.
> "That's fine."
> Sam dumps the rest on his plate trying, unsuccessfully, to hold back the water with his fork.
> "Some frozen vegetables taste very good," Sam says.
> "These were canned." Charles says.
> "Oh yeah? Well, they're very good. There's plenty of vegetables I don't mind. Hell. I never eat vegetables any more."
> "We're probably going to get scurvy or something. Did you know that when old people have varicose veins it's the start of scurvy? Malnutrition?"
> "Shut up about disgusting diseases while I'm eating. You don't hear me talking about the toilet, do you?"
> "Stop mentioning the goddamn toilet."
> "This is really very good wine," Sam says.

Admittedly Hemingway ("The Three-Day Blow") and Salinger are breathing heavily here, but there could be worse presences, and I read many patches of Beattie's dialogue—really all the novel amounts to—with delight. Extremely mannered, yes, but she is also a young writer, not yet 30 I should guess, and her recent story in *The New Yorker* ("Weekend") suggests that she may not be a prisoner of her clever mannerisms but is working through them to something more interesting, more human.

Not everyone can write a novel, though almost everyone tries.[5] Rita Mae Brown I lately encountered as a poet, advertised as the first Feminist

[5] IN HER DAY, by *Rita Mae Brown*. Daughters, Inc. $4.50 paperback. BLUE SKIES, NO CANDY, by *Gael Greene*. Morrow. $7.95.

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Lesbian to publish a book of poetry in America ("I follow the scent of a woman/ Melon heavy/ Ripe with Joy/ Inspiring me/ To rip great holes in the night . . .") and now, lo, she is a novelist too, as Kate Millet describes her on the back cover—"Good and mean and sassy . . . with our hangups and hassles and preoccupations." Well I'll say! *In Her Day* has passionate scenes of Lesbian Love, a number of jokes ("she can start a special service for lonely women, Dial-a-Dyke") and some rough, what we used to call manly talk, as when a femme art professor says to her cringing departmental Chairman, "if I ever hear of your pressuring a student again I'll kick you so hard you'll wear your balls for earrings." The Chairman, clearly humbled, "gulped and slipped out the door." I would too, and I am a Chairman. At another point three angry Feminist-Lesbians invade the office of a hateful gossip columnist named Martin Twanger: " 'All right, Twanger, get your fat ass out from under the desk,' Ilse barked." But what I liked even better than the humiliation scenes or the psychological analysis ("Carole's crack was far from supplying the balm she was looking for") or Lester the parrot (who has been drilled to say things like "Apeshit, batshit, fuckaroo/ All you girls lay down and screw") were the passages of deep sincerity and troubled stocktaking:

> At school she was expected to flutter over Beethoven or swoon at Renoir. She hated the whole thing. Gaining a feminist viewpoint taught her that art was nothing but an extended commercial for the rich . . . . And so she threw the baby out with the bathwater. She forgot about Mark Twain. She didn't know about the Artisans of the Middle Ages. She'd never even heard of Muriel Spark, Bertha Harris, Gwendolyn Brooks, Tillie Olsen, Barbara Deming, Maya Angelou, and all the other women fighting their way into recognition.

Don't miss it, any of it. Me, I plan to study up on Bertha Harris and those Artisans of the Middle Ages.

Prize for the dirtiest book of the fall published by a respectable house definitely goes to Gael Greene's *Blue Skies No Candy* which is very blue indeed. The publishers have been running ads showing how the women love it (because it tells the truth about women's sexual experience) and the men hate it (for the same reason). Nobody has focussed much on the writing, which is bad, but too sizzling for a respectable quarterly like this one. I can only say that Gael Greene's novel is not the sort of thing Henry James had in mind when he insisted that the novel should convey "felt life." James also knew, I remind myself and cease forthwith to mock, that bad novels are "swept with all the daubed canvases and spoiled marble into some unvisited limbo, or infinite rubbish yard beneath the back windows of the world." There, then, is where they go!

"The friendly chitchat and Raes humor, prevented Harry from becoming completely, and exclusively, preoccupied with Linda, though even with the joking and the laughing, he was constantly aware of her presence and a feeling that was new and vague, that seemed to come from her." The overworked punctuation and absence of the usual possessive apos-

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trophe (Raes) marks this as Hubert Selby Jrs (he also likes to write I/ll instead of I'll).[6] *The Demon* is about somebody possessed; it is also remarkable how good Harry White is at possessing any woman he happens to meet within about fifteen minutes of first being introduced (Linda, his wife-to-be, excepted). This is Mr. Selby's second book since *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, and doubtless, as Terry Southern says, Selby has a "great heart," in fact (I say) could pass for an all-American boy. But beyond that, the attitude towards his own creations, grossly gross as they are (Harry is obsessed with his work, with the challenge of other women, moves from seduction to shoplifting to murder) is strikingly devoid of the satiric. Instead you get Selby's earnest and unlovely sentences, puffing along sincerely: "Harry always brought Linda to peaks of excitement when they made love, but through her excitement she could feel a desperation within him, but easily pushed this knowledge aside, attributing it to his tension." Nothing wrong with that except the way it's written.

Whatever one's feeling about the linguistic violence of *Last Exit* there was little reason to suppose that Selby could write a strongly-shaped extended fiction. With Anthony Burgess, a veteran on the scene for nearly 20 years, the case is other, the latest result more disheartening.[7] He has claimed in a *Listener* interview that he didn't really want to write this novel, was talked into it by somebody (David Robinson) who had some splendid photographs of Rome and wanted an accompanying text. The photographs seem to me all modern-blurred-chic; the accompanying text, or novel, mainly disastrous. It harks back to the coarse joylessness of *Enderby Outside* (the second part of the Enderby trilogy) of a decade ago. In fact, when one thinks back and recalls that in 1967 Burgess had just published, in rapid and miraculous succession from 1962 on, *A Clockwork Orange, The Wanting Seed, Inside Mr. Enderby, Honey for the Bears, Nothing Like the Sun, Tremor of Intent,* plus five or so interesting novels in the years 1960–62, one is sad about what has happened since: the "experimental" highjinks of *MF*, the close-to-unreadable *Napoleon Symphony*, most recently the verse of *Moses*. There is hardly a laugh throughout *Beard's Roman Women,* and as Burgess trots out the old routines once more, with no adequate fictional correlative to bolster them, the shrillness and tiredness of it all becomes apparent. I feel bad about talking this way, since there is no novelist who, ten years ago, I had more of my critical soul invested in. Let me believe that this potboiler is there only to mark time for the substantial and composed novel on the way. If not, then I will go back to *The Long Day Wanes* (the Malaysian Trilogy) and reread the other admirable books he has given us.

"An artist of incomparably larger dimensions than Robert Frost," says Norman Mailer in one of his sillier pronouncements about Henry Miller in the recent anthology Mailer has made of the master's work.[8] These incomparably larger dimensions, in Mailer's cheerleading prose, are

[6] THE DEMON, by *Hubert Selby Jr.* Playboy Press. $8.95.
[7] BEARD'S ROMAN WOMEN, by *Anthony Burgess.* Hutchinson. $8.95.
[8] GENIUS AND LUST: A Journey Through the Major Writings of Henry Miller, by *Norman Mailer.* Grove Press. $12.50.

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sometimes defined thus: "He is the Grand Speleologist of the Vagina . . . He gets, after all, the livid ache of the groin, 9/10ths cramp, 1/10th sugar, the phallus über alles of the insatiable hard-on." Yes, we agree, Frost missed these dimensions. But as always Mailer has fine things to say about American writing and culture, while no one wants too quickly to go against both him and Orwell in underrating Miller. Yet how hard it is to read these pages from *Cancer, Capricorn,* and *The Rosy Crucifixion* (*Sexus* was better than I had expected) without one's mind wandering off someplace else. If Miller were only a shade more intellectually interesting, a shade funnier—even a hint of irony wouldn't spoil the brew. He *does* go on, and Mailer seems to love it, just the going on. Back in graduate school days we passed around those still forbidden *Tropic* novels, but nobody ever read one through. We looked (rightly so, I'm convinced) for the funny, dirty bits, so I regret the absence in this anthology of Henry and the Piano Teacher, or Henry and the Catholic Girl caught in a Thunderstorm. Meanwhile there was all that surrealist prose, plus what is probably most enduring in Miller, the endless talk-talk of these unmemorable characters. Still it's good to have this book; certainly no writer loses less by being anthologized than Henry Miller. The pages from *Sunday After the War* were a real discovery for me. But in general I'd rather read Mailer.

As one who tends to be suspicious of short stories unless they're on the longish side, I would salute the University of Illinois Press for their intelligent persistence in publishing volumes of stories by serious writers who won't, I presume, sell thousands of copies.[9] Of the four books noted here, I found most accomplished and engaging the work of Daniel Curley, whose previous fiction I've had some acquaintance with; and Andrew Fetler, new to me and very professional. Available in paperback and for a modest price, they are worth picking up and reading by anybody who would like to see how it's done well.

A rather unnoticed year-old novel deserves a word here, since Evan Connell Jr. continues to be as overlooked and unappreciated a novelist as we possess.[10] He is known, from comments on the jacket of the new novel, as "a writer's writer," as a man who "could not write a graceless sentence . . ." Of course this kind of praise is damning, and Connell suffers from it. In fact, he should be praised not for being The Graceful Stylist, though he is that certainly, but rather for his wryly accurate, painfully humorous renderings of ordinary life, as it was experienced by Mr. and Mrs. Bridge in Kansas City circa 1935 (those wonderful books should be read or reread by any sceptics in the crowd) or by the protagonist of his new novel, Otto Muhlbach, also featured in *The Connoisseur* (1974). In that novel Muhlbach was a hooked, amateur collector of pre-Colombian art; this time he meets an unpredictable fascinating girl half his age (he is a widower, insurance broker, two children, living in N.Y.) for whom he falls, with comic and other consequences.

[9] LOVE IN THE WINTER, by *Daniel Curley;* TO BYZANTIUM, by *Andrew Fetler;* ROLLING ALL THE TIME, by *James Ballard;* SMALL MOMENTS, by *Nancy Huddleston Packer*. University of Illinois Press. $6.95; $2.95 paperback.

[10] DOUBLE HONEYMOON, by *Evan Connell Jr.* G. P. Putman's. $7.95.

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The novel is narrated in a laconic third-person style, in that dangerous space provided by the present tense where every twitch can be recorded. Still, the mind is usually an interesting one, as when Muhlbach observes how relatively calm he feels after kissing Lambeth Brent in the cab, on the way to further satisfactions in her apartment:

> And if I'm just a bit queasy—well, imagine how nervous I'd have been twenty years ago.
>
> Then it occurs to him that among the many valuable things time has stolen is the capacity to feel excitement. Not totally, of course. Not yet. But take this particular situation. Years ago, he thinks, given the back seat of a taxicab or a few seconds of privacy in an elevator, how differently I'd have behaved. I'd have been steaming like a kettle . . . .
>
> He remembers Jean Gabin unbuttoning some young girl in a movie otherwise long forgotten—unbuttoning and unzipping her almost casually—and remembers the astonishment he felt that a Frenchman, especially a Frenchman, could proceed as though she were no more erotic than a souffle. Yes. Once upon a time that had seemed very odd. But no longer. The terrible urgency of youth—Where does it go? What becomes of it?

I realize the limitations of such a narrative voice, but also its virtues—seasoning, self-deprecation, middle-aged wistfulness. Muhlbach later describes, more sharply, a teenaged girl hitchhiker with knapsack and guitar whom Lambeth has urged him to give a ride to: "The dirt, the overfed indolence, the rank East Indian perfume, the grotesque frizzled hair, the insufferable conceit . . . And the voice. A voice that could open a tin can. I just do not like this child, he tells himself." There is a nice range of feelings in this narrator, and a particularly lovely moment later in the novel as he ranges through his son's stamp collection: "The Maldive Islands, Malta, Mauritius, the Mariannas, the Marshalls, Marienwerder, Memel and Manchukuo, for instance, all are expected to fit on a single page. Well, so be it. Besides, the page is practically blank. Nothing but a couple of uninspired British halfpennies from Malta." With Connell, the journey not the arrival matters, and this journey is solid and sensitive in its particularities of feeling and invention. A writer worth caring more about.

As is Brian Moore, whose new novel seems to have been received here with less than gratitude, since it deals with a married woman on holiday (away from her Ulster surgeon husband, a bit of a shit he) who falls into an affair with a young American.[11] This was judged, by some reviewers, to be insufficiently distinguishable from soap opera or romantic cliché. It didn't read that way to me, and I am beginning to think that when someone hollers "soap opera" as a term of abuse, what they really mean is that the novel under view reminds them of something that could conceivably occur in somebody's life, perhaps even their own. Graham Greene's praise of Moore as his favorite living novelist seems appropriate for this book which inevitably recalls Greene's postwar novels of adulterous dis-

[11] THE DOCTOR'S WIFE, by *Brian Moore*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $8.95.

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orders. Moore's "telling" is as accomplished as Greene's; the husband and son, spoken to long distance by Mrs. Redden (the heroine) with various degrees of deception and apology, are stubbornly there, though not attractively so; the lover is hard to dislike, a decent "Yank" and Sheila Redden herself is presented, coolly and with no special pleading on the novelist's part, as somebody to whom something life-changing just happened to happen.

The Doctor's Wife is one of those books which looks effortless, calls for no furrowed reading brow, moves at such a pace that you aren't usually aware you're reading a novel. As opposed to Greene's books there is no ideological dimension; even the politics—The Troubles—are just something back there in Ulster. The writing about sex on the other hand felt original, accurate and convincing, although there are no fancy tricks in Moore's bag—his performance typically looks very little like a performance. This, his eleventh novel, is only the third I've read, a deficiency I plan to remedy.

Now that, lamentably, she is dead, does everybody know just how good Elizabeth Taylor was, and is in this last of seventeen novels she left us?[12] The modern man's (why not the modern woman's?) Jane Austen, says Arthur Mizener; but Elizabeth Taylor's novels are like nobody else's. The photo of her shows a rather expressionless solidity of regard. I get the impression that she ate and drank well since there are tempting references, in the new book, to dishes you'd like to try, such as beef olives, or cheese and shallot flan—"faintly flecked with herbs." Nor does the widowed heroine turn down a drink when it's offered, indeed takes pleasure in pouring herself one. What most recommends her to me and astonishes me about her, is that she seems without beliefs, has a mind so fine (not to coin a phrase) that no flashy idea is likely to violate it. For her, fiction was satire, and all you needed to do with human life was tell the truth about it. So in her first novel, *At Mrs. Lippincote's*, she did no more than tell the truth about what it was like to be married to an R. A. F. officer and come to live in somebody else's house in a nowhere-in-particular English village. Now, thirty years later, comes *Blaming*, dedicated to her husband, and studying the experience of a woman who is widowed in the early chapters of the book. There is little "story" to speak of. Amy Henderson comes back to England (she had been on holiday in Greece with her husband who is recuperating from an operation but dies of a heart attack), spends a brief time with her son and his family, talks to her man-about-the-place, Ernie Pounce, guiltily entertains an American girl whom she met on holiday but really doesn't much like.

In reading Elizabeth Taylor one is seldom conscious of the *writing;* the plain uncluttered surface of her prose seems to exist only so that things can be put before us with an art that conceals art. Yet as one looks again, rereads, the true daring and surprise of this writing makes its impact. At one moment Amy's American Visitor Martha, about to marry for the first time and live in the States, asks Amy what she would do if she had but a week, a month to live. Amy answers, " 'I should turn out my desk . . . oh,

[12] BLAMING, by *Elizabeth Taylor*. Viking. $7.95.

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dear, drawer after drawer . . . throw away the shoddiest of my underclothes, and then . . . go on as before.' " Martha replies that she would kill herself at once; Amy, irritated, says

> "Why are you talking like this? It's marriage you're going to, not death. You haven't even tried marriage yet. No one could call it that. As you say it's made no difference. But it will. You'll learn what day-to-day living with someone's like. It's the most important thing that happens in people's lives. Yes, I do believe that."

But the idea falsifies the experience, and Amy goes on to muse:

> And then, for some reason, marriage suddenly became typified by a memory of boredom on wintry Sunday afternoons; all those newspapers littered about their feet—hers and Nick's—and ash-trays full of apple-cores and orange peel: those dark, frowsty hours, with rain most probably washing down the windows, hissing into the river, and no one at all walking by outside. They would doze in the sort of untidiness married couples often allow themselves. And I used to feel bored, she thought, and long for something bracing, even dangerous, to happen. And if he could return. I should be bored again, just the same.

That final sentence strikes the distinctive Elizabeth Taylor note. I am sorry she is dead; but the books are there to read, novels and stories, an *oeuvre* of size and finished delicacy. Let Viking Press see that this book is kept in print, and let it or some other publisher reprint at least a few of her earlier books. She is too good not to have available in the large.

As a faithful admirer of Updike (*Rabbit, Run; Olinger Stories; Of the Farm; Museums and Women; Rabbit Redux*) I am reluctant to compare him with another writer to his disadvantage; but coming after Elizabeth Taylor, and on the basis of his most recent novel, I should put him a good ways after.[13] "A novel" it says on the outside, but, coyly, "a romance" on the inside. When is a novel not a novel? Evidently when written in 1975 but set in 1962, and when we are asked to pretend that its abominable hero "Jerry" actually looks at a paper with the following "Headlines: "Negro Admitted to Mississippi U.; 3 Dead in Campus Riot; Khruschev Invites Kennedy to Moscow; Chou is Adamant in Soviet Dispute; Giants and Dodgers Tie for Pennant." Maybe so, but I don't believe it. What is Updike's attitude toward his lovers? Here is Jerry on the beach, at a tryst, presenting his bottle of wine to marvelous Sally:

> "Too bad it's warm," he said.
> "No," she said. "Warm wine is good."
> "Better than none, I suppose."
> "I said it's *good,* Jerry. Why don't you ever believe me?"
> "Listen, I believe you all the time." He took the bottle and imitated her; when he tipped his head back, the redness of the sun and of the wine mixed.

[13] MARRY ME, by *John Updike*. Knopf. $7.95.

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She cried, "You'll cut your nose!"

He lowered the bottle and squinted at her. He said of the wine, "It kind of swings."

She smiled and said, "You did." She touched the bridge of his nose and showed him a pink blot of blood on her white finger-tip. "Now," she said, "when I see you normally, I'll see the little cut on your nose, and only I will know how you got it."

They moved back to the blanket and drank from the paper cups. Then they drank the wine from each other's mouth; he spilled a little into her navel and lapped it up. In time he shyly asked, "Want me inside you?"

Yup, it turns out. I reminded myself that this was not a book called *Love Story,* by Erich Segal.

The book gets stronger as soon as it shifts focus, in "The Reacting of Ruth," to Jerry's wife. Updike seems truly interested in her, drops much of the giggly headiness with which he presents Jerry and Sally (Jerry is also allowed italicized lyric splurges, the only Deeply Poetic Prose in an otherwise—for Updike—chastely written novel). Here, for example is how Ruth's own earlier and concluded affair (with Sally's husband) is summarized:

On the whole she was well satisfied with her affair, and as she zipped up the children's snowsuits, or closed a roast into the oven, thought of this adventure snug in her past with some complacence. She judged herself improved and deepened in about the normal amount—she had dared danger and carried wisdom away, a more complete and tolerant woman. She had had boyfriends, a husband, a lover; it seemed she could rest.

This is fine, especially as that roast gets closed into the oven; but the book never rises beyond it and frequently settles for a good deal less. And the shade of *Couples,* another romance for all its realistic props, hangs eerily over *Marry Me,* as when Jerry is sad after Sunday volleyball fun with the young marrieds of Greenwood. But whatever you may think of the spun-out fantasies of *Couples,* it is a good deal more interesting page by page than this wan sequel, so unconvincingly set back in that same time. A good deal less verbally manic than *A Month of Sundays* (Updike's attempt to play Nabokov) it errs on the side of gentle sweetness ("*Your hair is so soft, Jerry. I washed it last night. For you.*") Anybody who has read Updike's stories in the *New Yorker* over the past few years, mostly about members of a family, knows that he has never written better, so it may be, as always with him, a problem of finding the right form for a novel. There is more passion, anguish and wit in the story "Separating" (published in June, 1975) than in Updike's last two novels put together. Which reminds me that I should be grateful for the good rather than carp too loudly at the not-so-good.

The not-so-good in John Gardner's new book is a novel within the novel

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which takes up too many words.[14] Gardner has always been hospitable to playing around with his undeniable talent for realism; he may feel that with Melville and Faulkner in the background it is not the part of valor to tell his story straight. At any rate, *The Sunlight Dialogues* introduced those dialogues between police chief Clumly and the mad Sunlight Man, as well as general speculation about ultimate concerns, into its authoritative laying-out of intertwined lives around Batavia, New York. While *Nickel Mountain* (1973) subtitled itself "A Pastoral Novel" and contained a number of etchings which helped freeze the book's narrative (the new book also has distracting and, I would say, unlovely illustrations). And then there are Gardner's reinvention of classic myths. It may be that his imagination is truly as quirky and playful as it would appear; it may also be that any young novelist (Gardner is 43) operating in America during the last ten years, surrounded by performers like Mailer, Pynchon or Barth might feel that mere sober unmannered narration could hardly compete with the headier delights of fabulation. At any rate, there is probably less strangeness here than meets the eye.

October Light traces a developing quarrel between an old man and his widowed sister, living together on a mountain farm just outside Bennington, Vermont. The old man, James Page, has locked the sister in her bedroom where she discovers and begins to read a "trashy novel" of action left about by Page's grandson and titled *The Smugglers of Lost Soul's Rock.* With the aid of this book and a cache of apples, Sally Page Abbot fortifies herself against the entreaties of various relatives and friends, who show up or are summoned as her holdout lengthens and her will to defy James Page hardens. The quarrel runs it course, produces various human complications, comic and not-so-comic. As the quarrel ends, so does Gardner's novel.

The author acknowledges (in the Acknowledgments) that he wrote the trashy novel in collaboration with his wife, and there is also a pile of epigraphs to chapters and to the whole novel which reminds us that this is the Bicentennial. I don't believe Gardner's novel is seriously enhanced or compellingly extended by all this fancy, bred in the head rather than the heart. Yet neither does the book sink under its weight. Although the novel Sally Page Abbott reads during her confinement in the room is less than absorbing to the reader, neither is it simply absorbing to the character, who by turns finds it vulgar, silly and unbelievable (as well as incomplete—there are pages missing) but who is nonetheless fascinated by "the adventure flickering on the wall of her brain, a phantom world filled with its own queer laws and character." Sally moves back and forth from life to art, pairing characters with their real life counterparts; and these reflections, complemented by her brother's and played off against the absurd but appalling escalation of their quarrel, are very absorbing indeed, every bit as violent and crazy (truth being stronger than fiction) as the inserted bad novel.

[14] OCTOBER LIGHT, by *John Gardner,* Knopf. $10.00.

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Like one of Frost's dramatic dialogues—"Home Burial" for example—there is a skeleton in the closet, the confronting of which brings the book to a troubled and uneasy resolution. Like Frost's dialogues also, something terrible happens for which nobody is to blame; a tragic event from the past casts its shadow over the contortions, stubborn and disputatious, of the present. Gardner's real distinction and solidity as a novelist can be felt through the delicate tact with which, for all its formal props and gimmicks, he avoids pressing his story into allegorical truth or moral edification. The novelist's instinctive recalcitrance, his unwillingness to conclude, is embodied in a passage about October which comes at the end of a description of the succession of months on a Vermont farm:

> Now, in October, the farmwork was slackening, the drudgery had paid off: the last of the corn went flying into the silo with a clackety roar and a smell as sweet as honey; the beans were harvested in half a day, like an afterthought; on the porch and out by the roadside stood mountains of pumpkins. The trees turned—those along the paved roads first, dying from the salt put down in winter—sugar maples orange, pink, and yellow on one branch, elm trees pale yellow, birch trees speckled with a lemony yellow, still other trees carmine and vermillion and ochre, red maples as fresh as red blood. Soon—anytime from mid-October to the end of November—it would be locking time.

The novel unfolds itself in this imaginative space, this sad and touching October light in which truly and painfully the fact turns out to be the sweetest dream that labor knows, if not so sweet as one once hoped. As the rendering of seasonal fact in this novel must be praised, so should its regional grasp; one doesn't have to have lived near Bennington to believe the book's evocations of Mt. Anthony seem through fog, or Prospect Mountain taken at a fast clip in a truck driven by an enraged old fart (our hero, James Page), or not-so-late night drinking at a tavern outside the town where Bennington College girls stop in with something on their minds, or what it feels like to wake up with a hangover and pull yourself together in order to do the chores on your mountain farm.

The book is regionally so alive, morally so decent and interesting, that its special features (epigraphs, novel-within-novel, artificial chapter titles, illustrations) may be endured as lively notions necessary to release this novelist's story-telling propensities. But at the risk of slighting the experimental" aspect of Gardner's art (though anything experimental is probably bound to be bad) I would insist upon its traditional fictional virtues; the leisured and exploring creation of life. *October Light* is more accessible, shorter and more concentrated than *The Sunlight Dialogues,* less glassily or symbolically poetic than *Nickel Mountain.* It seems to me John Gardner's strongest and sanest piece of fiction, recognizing that indeed it will soon be locking time in more ways than one, but that in the interim it is possible to compose oneself in words with grace and energy.

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"I really didn't enjoy it."
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"I enjoyed it immensely. There is something of a sensibility akin to Grace Paley's at times. The authority of the prose is extraordinary."
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